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ZET

Somerset

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

AND

MODERN SCEPTICISM.

BY

THE DUKE OF SOMERSET, K.G.

"Recte enim veritas filia temporis dicitur non auctoritatis."

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ASTOR LENOX AND
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PREFACE.

For many years past religious questions have incessantly interfered with the social and educational improvement of the community. Instead of gradually diminishing in their effects, these causes of disturbance seem to be increasing.

A politician would gladly avoid touching these thorny subjects, but he observes that the religious teachers never cease from intermeddling with politics.

The Church of Rome, as in olden times, pours imprecations on our heads; and the Roman Catholic clergy in the united kingdom, administer the same balm in a more inconvenient form.

The Established Church distracts us with so many doctrinal disputes and perplexing doubts,

that we almost wish she would slumber again as she did during the greater part of the last century.

The Non-conformists appear to be exasperated, and threaten to upset everything from the village-school to the cabinet, unless they are allowed to have their own way.

All these convulsive movements are symptoms of mental disquietude, which forebodes a religious change.

Meanwhile, every Protestant may exercise his private judgment; and since inquiry cannot easily make matters worse, let us again examine into the fountain-head of all these differences, and see whether there is any possible solution at least of the Protestant difficulties.

We live in an age of free thinking and plain speaking, "rarâ temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quæ velis, et, quæ sentias dicere, licet."

BULSTRODE, *November*, 1871.

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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

AND

MODERN SCEPTICISM.

ZET

INTRODUCTION

It is humiliating to be obliged to confess that after eighteen hundred years of Christian teaching, man has made no advance in certainty of religious knowledge.

So far from any approach to certainty, the opinions of educated society upon the most important questions which can occupy the human mind appear at the present time to be more unsettled than at any previous period of European history.

In every other branch of knowledge assiduous study and persevering industry have been rewarded with at least partial success. Some progress has been made, and some re-

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sults obtained, which, while they have contributed to the convenience or to the happiness of mankind, have encouraged fresh exertions and opened a prospect of future acquisitions.

In the study of revealed religion this process seems to have been reversed. The labour of successive generations, the services of men specially set apart for this teaching, the accumulated learning of former ages, the voluminous and still increasing literature of the present day, all alike fail in establishing any generally acknowledged definite convictions. On the contrary, in all free communities the greatest diversity of religious opinion prevails; doubts and controversies range over a wider area in proportion to the advancement of learning, until the differences of Christian sects lose their significance in comparison with far deeper questions, which are attracting the notice of educated society.

A reference to former years will show the change in religious thought which has gradually

forced its way through the cultivated classes of the community.

At the beginning of the last century the boundary line between religious and sceptical literature was distinct and definite. The sceptical writers were then the open enemies of the clergy, and the avowed opponents of Christianity. The clergy retorted on their adversaries with great bitterness and ability, branded them with the name of Atheists, and made no allowance for the mildest suggestion of doubt.

Philosophy, science and literature were then the firm friends and defenders of revealed religion. Locke paraphrased the Pauline epistles. Sir Isaac Newton expounded prophecy. Addison cited with complacent confidence the letter of King Agbarus to Christ, as a record of great authority, and an evidence of Christian truth.

In the present day philosophy and science stand aloof in unfriendly attitudes, whilst

literature gives currency to a thousand speculative opinions unfavourable to the old established beliefs.

This change is the result of various influences. The progress of physical science, the critical examination of ancient history in connexion with kindred researches, and, above all, the continued study of the Scriptures have concurred to modify the religious beliefs of the Protestant world.

The whole system of modern education tends towards the same result. Men who have been carefully trained to distrust authority, and to rely for the acquisition of knowledge upon experiment, analysis, and patient research, cannot subsequently divest themselves of a habit of mind which has become a part of their nature. They must either suppress and relinquish all religious thought, or they must apply to the records of revealed religion the same spirit of investigation, which has already re-opened the

sources of history, and extended the domain of science.

With the diffusion of education these influences will be more widely felt. It is now manifest that theological and secular instruction run in two opposite currents of thought. The divergence may occasionally be glossed over by dazzling eloquence, or concealed under a haze of metaphysical learning, but the enchantment is soon dispelled, and the two antagonists arise again, striving for mastery over the human mind.

More than two centuries have elapsed since Selden declared that the words "scrutamini scripturas" had undone the world. The interval has tended, in one sense at least, to confirm his prediction. The search of the Scriptures has impaired the authority of Scripture, and the learned endeavours to remove obscurity have increased doubt.

Hence scepticism has been naturalized in modern society, and will not be repressed by

denunciations against infidelity, or by the lamentations of sentimental piety.

The efforts of thoughtful and earnest minds to arrive at religious truth have in all ages produced some form of scepticism. A dissatisfaction with the prevalent beliefs of their countrymen is visible in the sublime thoughts of the Hebrew prophets, who rejected with scorn the precepts of the ceremonial law. An analogous feeling gave birth to the moral scepticism of the book of Job, and to the intellectual doubts of the book of Ecclesiastes.

A somewhat similar mental disturbance is observable in every period of mental activity. It is not therefore surprising that in the present day there should be many varieties of scepticism, each of which has its own special and appropriate literature.

The philosophical sceptic examines into the original source of religious belief in the human mind, plunges his reader into a maze of metaphysics, and represents every religion to be merely a phase of thought.

The scientific sceptic reasons from the known to the unknown, rejects the miraculous, and regards revelation as an untenable theory.

The antiquarian sceptic explores records of undated antiquity, pursues the shadowy forms of Mithra or Zoroaster, and gropes amongst oriental relics until he half believes that he can descry the cradle of Christianity hidden amidst the myths and cosmogonies of the remote East.

Different minds are fascinated by these different pursuits, and each may perhaps have its use in stimulating the instruction of mankind.

Meanwhile under these various impulses the progress of religious education is impeded, and the wisdom of Parliament is perplexed.

Whilst our statesmen and public speakers are proclaiming the indispensable necessity of a Christian education; whilst our clergy are insisting on dogmatic theology, scepticism pervades the whole atmosphere of thought,

leads the most learned societies, colours the religious literature of the day, and even mounts into the pulpits of the Church.

It would however be a grave mistake to assume that scepticism is in its nature irreligious or immoral. Some minds in their eager search for truth, while recoiling from dogmatic theology, have indeed wandered beyond the confines of Christianity. But the mass of society is anxiously seeking a belief which shall not be at issue with the moral sense of educated men.

For this purpose theologians, biblical critics, and other learned men have toiled incessantly, and it is now obvious that the theology of former ages cannot be permanently maintained.

To enter fully into these elaborate inquiries would occupy too large a space, but the following pages contain a condensed outline of the reasoning upon Christian history and Christian doctrine, which is thought to justify the opinion here expressed.

The several points at issue are compressed into short chapters, so as not tediously to repeat objections, which are already familiar to many readers, who will thus be enabled, from a comprehensive survey of the subject, to perceive the process of religious change, which is gradually permeating the Protestant world.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST DIFFICULTY.

So long as Christians believed in the personification of evil, in demoniacal possession, in the frequent intervention of the devil, and in a vast scheme of Satanic agency visibly disturbing the order of nature; many marvellous incidents related in the Gospels were in unison with popular belief. These narratives, so far from presenting any difficulty to Christians, were regarded as evidence, and adduced in proof, of the truth of the Gospels.

Satan appeared to be a reluctant, but irrefutable, witness on behalf of the Christian revelation. He had, as the Gospels stated, openly recognised Jesus, admitting his divine power, but deprecating its exercise.

From the commencement of the Christian

era until comparatively modern times the existence of evil spirits was appealed to in vindication of the Gospel-history.

During many centuries the fear of the devil, and the dread of falling under his dominion, were strong inducements to the outward observances of religion, and even sometimes to the practice of moral virtue. The authority of the clergy was moreover enhanced by their supposed ability to counteract this fearful adversary.

Thus Satan, whilst he was the terror of the multitude, was also the efficient ally of the priest. In some cases he became the guardian angel of the Church, strengthening her empire, and enabling her to repress the lawless violence of men, whom no human authority could control.

It cannot however be denied that this belief was attended with many evils. History records the fearful persecutions which superstitious ignorance inflicted on persons, who were sup-

posed to be in league with the devil. These acts of cruelty were often countenanced and sometimes instigated by Christian teachers.

The Reformation, which dissipated some venerable illusions, seems to have increased the popular belief in the active intervention of evil spirits. The Protestant clergy of all denominations insisted on the verbal accuracy of the Scriptures;—what the clergy taught the law confirmed; the reality of demoniacal possession with all its cruel and mischievous consequences was universally acknowledged; and the Scripture furnished the devil with his credentials.

The first symptoms of disbelief in the marvellous stories of Satanic agency were reprehended by the clergy, and repressed by the religious feelings of society. It was deemed presumptuous free-thinking to question modern instances of diabolic possession. This opinion checked inquiry, and silenced the expression of doubt.

The sermons of our most distinguished divines will prove to how late a period the belief in the intervention of the devil was regarded as an important bulwark of the Christian faith.

Open, for instance, the sermons of Barrow, and his works are selected not only because he was a man distinguished for vigour of mind, and compass of knowledge, but more especially because he was a man of science, the preceptor of Newton, and foremost among the founders of the Royal Society. Barrow, in one of his sermons on the Creed, speaks of apparitions, visions, intercourse and confederacy with bad spirits—"All these things," he adds, "any man who shall affirm them to be mere fiction and delusion, must thereby with exceeding immodesty charge the world with vanity and malignity, worthy historians with inconsiderateness and fraud, lawgivers with silliness or rashness, and a vast number of witnesses with the greatest malice or madness,—all which

have concurred to assert these matters of fact." Barrow then applies his argument: "The truth and reality of these things, if admitted, contribute much to the belief of that divinity, which our discourse studies to maintain."

In a similar strain, Bull (Bishop of St. David's), ventures while defending Scripture to assert, "In our own age we have had some unquestionable instances of persons possessed by evil spirits."

Any person who at that time had presumed to question these matters of fact, would have incurred the imputation of infidelity or of atheism, while devout believers would have cited in justification of their opinion the authority of the scientific Barrow, and of the learned Bishop Bull.

Yet now the worthy historians, the wise lawgivers, the vast concourse of witnesses are all equally unavailing; the spell is broken, the evil spirits have vanished, and these phantoms of discredited tradition will not again

re-visit a more experienced and incredulous world.

If the reality of these things, according to the argument of Barrow, contributed to the belief of that system of divinity which he laboured to maintain, it must equally follow that the unreality of these things, if admitted, will lead to the opposite conclusion. This result has occurred. The evil spirits of the Gospels have shared the fate of their legitimate descendants; they also were the creations of a popular delusion, which, having been erroneously accredited by the Evangelists, took forcible possession of the Christian mind. The language of the fathers, the prayers of the saints, the exorcisms of the Church, confirmed instead of invalidating their base tenure, until they were finally cast out and expelled by the unanimous disbelief of a more instructed society.

Here, then, is the first divergence of modern society from the Gospel-history. The educated

Protestant no longer believes what the Evangelists believed and affirmed.

This altered condition of belief constitutes a serious difficulty, because it constrains every thoughtful man to consider how far the Gospel narratives can be implicitly accepted as of Divine authority, or even as historical truth.

The ministers of religion in treating of these marvellous incidents, usually suggest that Jesus perhaps condescended to use the popular language of his age and country. He acquiesced, they say, in erroneous beliefs, which could only be corrected by the future advancement of human knowledge.

This explanation is evasive, and moreover involves the admission of a serious misstatement on the part of the Evangelists, who cite the evil spirits as witnesses to the divine power of Jesus. These narratives, if they are accepted as true, give a solemn sanction to the belief in Satanic possession, and did practically establish it for many centuries.

A careful examination of the New Testament justifies the obvious solution that these Gospels are not exempt from human imperfection.

The first three Evangelists record these marvels, while the fourth Gospel altogether omits these demoniacs. Was this silence a tacit repudiation of idle tales, which the writer of that Gospel did not wish openly to contradict?

The author of the Acts mentions similar marvels, one most remarkable instance is said to have occurred at Ephesus. According to the traditions of the Church, St. John is supposed to have resided afterwards at Ephesus, yet he did not confirm any such narratives, or adduce them as proofs of the divine nature of Jesus.

St. Paul, again, although repeatedly alluding to a spiritual power of evil, did not in any of his epistles proclaim such a material and visible agency of Satan.

Hence it may be concluded that the first three Evangelists shared the superstitious notions of

their countrymen, and felt no hesitation in recording traditions which were current amongst their contemporaries.

They, in common with other Jews, believed that an evil spirit could enter into the bodies of men, use human organs as passive instruments, and exhibit supernatural knowledge through the agency of the human voice.

According to the belief of these Evangelists this was the order of nature, and the miraculous power of Jesus was displayed in superseding that order, and in compelling the evil spirits to relinquish their unfortunate victims.

The rejection of these narratives is founded on the attentive study of Scripture. The class of miracles in relation to demoniacs can only be accepted by first accepting the order of nature indispensable to the exercise of this miraculous power.

The argument for or against miracles does not here enter into the question at issue. These narratives belong to Jewish traditions, and are rejected as traditional.

This view, if adopted, undoubtedly impairs the authority of the Gospel history. On this subject change of opinion is inevitable. There are, it has been said, many other illusions which will be gradually cast out of the Protestant mind, although they may rend their victim as they come out of him, and leave him half dead at their departure.

The whole subject of Satanic agency has occupied the attention of learned men in its two phases, namely, as a popular delusion, and as a fanciful philosophic theory. Both these forms of belief are found in the Apocryphal books, whilst in the New Testament the first is described in the Gospels, and the last in the Epistles of St. Paul.

To these last it will be convenient to revert hereafter.

CHAPTER II.

THE ONLY VISIBLE SOLUTION.

When once human error has been accepted as the solution of Scriptural difficulties, many portions of the Gospel history will be readily subjected to the same mode of explanation.

The manifestations connected with the nativity and baptism of Jesus, had in early times been withdrawn from the province of legitimate history. The angelic visions of Zacharias and of the Virgin; the alternate hymns sung by Elizabeth and Mary; the choir of angels chanting to the shepherds; the visit of the Eastern sages under the guidance of a star, and their homage to the King of the Jews;—are all incidents presented in the poetical form of earlier Hebrew records.

So again at the baptism, the opening of the

heavens, the miraculous voice, the divine nature descending in the bodily form of a dove, were regarded, it is said even by Luther and by Calvin, as unhistorical, though sacred, recitals, typical of divine truth.

CHAPTER III.

THE STAR.

Stella facem ducens multâ cum luce cucurrit.

MODERN society has discarded astrology as a fictitious science. When however St. Augustine found it necessary to denounce this study, and in later centuries when the Church excommunicated astrologers; the marvellous luminary, which was recognised by Eastern sages to be the special star belonging to the King of the Jews, seemed to establish the truth of this science, and thus to contravene the preaching of the Saint, and the censures of the Church.

The astronomers of a former age, not venturing to doubt the verbal accuracy of the Scriptures, sought some stellar phenomenon to confirm what they held to be revealed truth. Thus Kepler entered into elaborate calculations

to explain this strange star by planetary perturbations.

Modern expounders of Scripture now admit that the star belongs to the poetical imagery of a nascent creed. It has indeed a curious family likeness to the star described by Virgil, and even recalls the astrological associations commemorated by Horace. Poets are often plagiarists, and fiction repeats itself in different minds. The Protestant therefore feels himself justified in discarding this portion of the Gospel from the category of authentic history.

In a typical or figurative sense the narrative contains a truth.

The East did bestow her gifts on the new religion; although the European world has not willingly acknowledged the contribution.

Wisdom and wealth have bowed down in humble submission to the superior power of a faith, which in its original purity must for ever hold the human mind in subjection.

The voice from heaven at the baptism of

Jesus, is necessarily associated with similar incidents, related in other chapters of the New Testament.

A belief in these heavenly voices was a common superstition of the Jews. The epistle ascribed to St. Peter, so far disparages these voices that it refers to the word of prophecy as a more sure proof of divine truth. Sherlock, in his Discourse on the Prophecies, observes, "Is it possible that St. Peter, or any man in his senses, could make such a comparison?" Sherlock reasoned according to the opinion of his own day, but when that epistle was written, the frequency of these "airy tongues that syllable men's names," was so generally recognised, that familiarity had weakened their effect. A modern Protestant cannot be expected to be more Catholic than St. Peter, or to attach high authority to a phenomenon which an Apostle had depreciated.

The dove was an accepted type of heavenly wisdom, as may be seen in the writings of

Philo. The dove had been an object of popular veneration in Palestine, and it is not to be supposed that a special miracle was performed for the purpose of consecrating an old Syrian superstition.

These symbols have the stamp of Jewish legends, and it is now needless to discuss them further.

"——— volitat crebras intacta per urbes
Alba Palæstino sancta columba Syro."

CHAPTER IV.

HEBREW POETRY.

"Utinam tam facile vera invenire possim quam falsa convincere."

If the early chapters of the Gospel history can no longer be received as a record of actual events, this conclusion has been arrived at from the study of Scripture itself.

Hymns recalling scenes and associations of the Hebrew race may have fascinated the first disciples by a shadowy promise of the overthrow of their heathen conquerors, and the establishment of a Jewish kingdom under a national sovereign. But we may reasonably suppose that the language was typical, and capable only of a metaphorical fulfilment.

The chief interest of these chapters now consists in the light which they throw upon

the date when such hymns could have been written, or at least orally repeated. They bear the distinctive features of Judaism, and must have been circulated amongst the first Jewish converts. Such poems could hardly have originated amongst a subsequent generation, when the whole character of Christianity was already changed. This chronological testimony appears to refute the theories which ascribe the Gospels to a later period.

The hymns and types of the Gospels may still please imaginative minds, but they do not satisfy the religious wants of the present age. The exigencies of modern thought require more distinct and definite convictions. Serious men will say, "If these books are so deeply coloured by the popular traditions and poetical imagery of the Hebrew race, where does reliable history begin? If the nativity of Jesus is thus surrounded by legends, is the Virgin herself historical?"

CHAPTER V.

THE VIRGIN MARY.

"Caput inter nubila condit."

It has been frequently observed that in studying the early records of a nation, the attempt to separate actual history from legendary tradition becomes a hopeless task. The same obscurity unfortunately overclouds the dawn of Christianity. The biblical student in his honest endeavour to obtain historical truth, finds himself bewildered in a maze of poetry which intercepts his course. If, in his efforts to escape from this enchanted ground, he turns to the writings of St. Paul, the Apostle only increases his doubts. Paul alludes more than once to the lineage of Jesus, but he never mentions the Virgin Mary. This omission is the more remarkable because the Apostle is

unusually precise in relating the lineage of Jesus. Paul emphatically states, "Jesus was of the seed of David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead."

Paul omits the angelic annunciation, the miraculous birth, and the heavenly acknowledgment at the baptism. He moreover asserts that the resurrection from the dead was the act by which the divine nature of Jesus was established.

St. Paul assuredly gave no heed to the endless genealogies which have perplexed modern commentators, but it is not easy to explain his total silence on the birth of Jesus, while the Epistles vindicate the divine nature of Jesus. An irrepressible suspicion arises that, either the miraculous nativity was a later tradition, or that Paul did not accept the narrative which was subsequently incorporated in two of the Gospels.

Zealous devotion delights in magnifying the object of its affectionate enthusiasm, and legendary beliefs grow up rapidly under the unconscious action of sympathizing minds. In all traditions popular belief usually selects the one which appears most marvellous, and consequently the tenet, that Jesus was of the seed of David according to the flesh, was willingly set aside, and a birth contrary to the flesh became the prevalent doctrine.

By disjoining the words of Isaiah from the context to which they belong, and affixing a precise meaning to an expression of doubtful signification, a prophecy was made applicable to the occasion. This belief was further assisted by an Eastern notion of special purity, which was associated with birth from a virgin.

St. Paul had discountenanced this notion when he wrote—"I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself." As time advanced, the superstitious doctrine of purity increasing in intensity led later

worshippers to declare that Mary after the birth of Jesus must always have continued to be a virgin. In this they contradicted the admonition of the Angel as related by Matthew, but the same zeal which set aside the language of an Apostle, could easily disregard the assertions of an Evangelist.

Paul had indeed mentioned the Lord's brother, and there was scriptural evidence of brothers and sisters. These statements were all discarded as a disparagement to Mary. These brothers, it was said, were cousins, or Joseph was a widower, and even ninety years old, when he married Mary, whilst these brothers were his children by a former wife.

This glorification of Mary became gradually insufficient for the increasing devotion of the faithful, and new honours were invented. "The master of superstition," says Bacon, "is the people, and in all superstitions wise "men follow fools." The Church, whether leading or following, consecrated every suc-

cessive legend. It was affirmed that Mary's mother was a saint, and the birth of Mary herself must have been free from the sinful taint of the flesh.

In succeeding centuries the imagination of pious men took a still higher flight, and another elevation of Mary was announced. A special blessing had been promised to the pure in heart, and this privilege must in Mary have received a literal accomplishment. Mary must have ascended in the body to heaven.

Thus the beatified Virgin was exalted above all the saints of heaven, and in every church a chapel or an altar was dedicated to the mother of God. In many Christian churches her painted and jewelled effigy may still be seen, draped in a celestial robe, with a radiant glory on her head, receiving the adoration or the offerings of her suppliant votaries.

Between the significant silence of the Pauline epistles and the last pontifical climax of extravagant adulation, there were several gra-

dations or developments of doctrine. Every successive generation paid some tribute to the shrine of Mary. The first age was certainly not deficient in imaginative piety, and the contemporaries of St. Paul were not more careful of historical truth than Christians in subsequent centuries.

The doctrine of the bodily assumption of the Virgin seems to conflict with another Catholic tradition, according to which the Virgin Mary was buried at Ephesus.

In that city, at all events, the tomb of the Virgin was shown. There also the first cathedral was dedicated to her, and divine honours paid to her. This veneration or worship was in the first instance censured by the Church, but it was afterwards permitted and eventually encouraged.—(See on this point Tillemont Hist. Eccles.)

Thus, it may be observed, at Ephesus one virgin displaced another,—Mary superseded Diana, and the mother of God received the

incense which had been previously offered to the many-bosomed mother of nature. The Ephesians therefore still retained their tutelary goddess, but the new idolatry was cleansed from all sensual accompaniments, the altar was no longer defiled with blood.

The worship of the Virgin has generally exercised a baneful influence on the character of the people amongst whom it has prevailed. The notion that supplicants, by propitiating the mother of God, could secure a friend at the court of heaven, tended to vitiate religion. Her fabled interference even in this life, was countenanced by the priesthood, who gave currency to a thousand idle tales, whereby the laws of nature and of morality were alike violated. Hence, throughout a large portion of the Christian world, the Virgin has become the favourite object of popular devotion, whilst the moral Ruler of the universe is forgotten.

This serious evil is inadequately compensated by the more refined feeling for artistic beauty,

which the worship of the Madonna may have evoked.

Amongst Protestants the Virgin Mary may, it is said, be harmlessly venerated as the idealised impersonation of purity, the deified conception of heavenly love, the hallowed type of divine condescension.

> Still to the lowly soul
> He doth Himself impart,
> And for His cradle and His throne
> Chooses the pure in heart.

Veneration however is closely allied to worship, and worship brought in its train rosaries, salutations, and an endless variety of superstitious usages, debasing man and dishonouring God.

On a calm survey of the history relating to the mysterious union of the divine with the human nature, there appear to have been in the primitive Church three different beliefs.

The belief of St. Paul that the resurrection of Jesus was the first declaration of His divine nature.

The belief that the descent of the Holy Spirit at the baptism was the miracle wherein the union was accomplished.

The belief in a material union before the birth. This doctrine eventually prevailed, and all other ideas were denounced and suppressed as heretical.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GLOOM DARKENS.

Quale per incertam lunam sub luce malignâ
Est iter in silvis.

THE difficulties in the Gospel-history do not diminish with the progress of the narratives. The reader finds himself bewildered by deeper perplexities and more alarming doubts.

The moral questions which necessarily arise from the study of Scripture remain to this day unanswered.

A firm belief in a beneficent and merciful Deity is the primary and most cherished principle of Christianity—

"If this fail
The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble."

A divine command had, according to

Scripture, been given to the Jews enjoining them to put to death any person, although he were a prophet or even a worker of miracles, who should turn them away from the God of their fathers, and invite them to a new religion. This command was clear, peremptory, and inexorable. In what position were the Jews in regard to the teaching of Jesus? They beheld a man, who (if the Gospels are accurate) reprobated usages handed down from the time of the patriarchs, frequently violated their sabbaths, and desired to establish a new religion. The Jewish law and the prophets were on this point equally decided. Jehovah had said, "I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour."

Yet these Jews now saw a man whose parentage was known, who had dwelt for thirty years in a provincial town, whence he had lately come forth as the teacher of a new religion. If then the Jewish law was divine, the Jews must either have associated and

identified Jesus with Jehovah, or have treated him as a blasphemer.

Are not the terrible words of Ezekiel applicable to this unfortunate nation: "I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live."

The foreknowledge which selected Judas as an Apostle suggests other moral difficulties which it is painful to reflect upon.

In these instances the conduct ascribed to the divine Being appears to be irreconcilable with the eternal principles of justice and of benevolence. There is a discord between religion and morality. Some error has disarranged the harmony, which should prevail in the moral as well as in the material world. Who can doubt that, whenever Christianity is more fully understood, these difficulties will be removed? A deeper search, or a more enlarged view of religious truth will furnish a solution, even if it should necessitate the rejection of statements supposed to be divinely inspired.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OPEN BIBLE.

A STUDENT, who relies on the reiterated assertion that Christianity fears no inquiry, and that the open Bible is the inheritance of Protestants, naturally directs his attention to the elaborate works on the Gospel-history, which the literature of the present century has so abundantly supplied. With an earnest desire to arrive at some satisfactory result he examines histories of Christianity, introductions to the New Testament, harmonies of the Gospels, Christian evidences, lives of Jesus, treatises on the nature and personality of Christ, and other works calculated to explain this mysterious subject.

Even the cold dissecting knife of German criticism causes no shudder in the i quisitive but unimpassioned student. He calmly notes

coincidences, and balances conflicting statements, in order fairly to weigh their value, and to observe how far they tend to confirm or to invalidate the theories propounded.

After all his labour he perceives that the history becomes less and less distinct, as the investigation is more searching and precise. Every new publication proves that its author deems former explanations to be faulty or insufficient, and his refutation of previous solutions is usually the most conclusive portion of his work.

The student is reluctantly compelled to admit that the materials for a trustworthy life of Jesus, and for a truthful history of those momentous events do not exist, whilst conjectural histories compiled in our own days are idle dreams.

These commentaries and critical dissertations have not however been unprofitable. The scepticism of a former age has been refuted by the criticism of a later period.

The imputation of forgery and fraud made against the evangelists by writers in the last century has been dispelled by a more careful study of the Gospels.

One remarkable characteristic of these books is the simple truthfulness with which the evangelists record the traditions therein collected, even when those traditions are unfavourable to their own conclusions. Thus they relate that Jesus met with little belief or estimation amongst his own kin, and in his own country. Such an avowal seems hardly reconcilable with the miracles said to have accompanied his birth and baptism. If these supernatural occurrences did not convince his own kin, the subsequent recital of them could not be expected to satisfy a distant posterity.

So again the evangelists admit that the multitude believed John the Baptist to be a prophet, while they hesitated to acknowledge Jesus. This admission disposes of the reason-

ing of Paley and other writers, who argue that miracles were indispensable as the credentials of a divine mission.

The evangelists candidly confess that the apostles whom Jesus had selected did not implicitly believe in him; they did not understand his doctrines, they doubted his power, and they deserted him on the first approach of danger.

Yet these apostles belonged to a race, which had oftentimes astonished the world by its courage in facing torture and death under the impulse of religious faith.

Even in relating the great miracle of the resurrection of Jesus, the two earliest Gospels close their narratives with expressions of doubt and unbelief.

Such language could only have been adopted by writers conscientiously anxious to relate the traditions exactly as they had become current amongst the first disciples. In this respect the truthfulness of the evangelists

offers a striking contrast to the conduct of subsequent ecclesiastical historians.

Christianity in so far as it is connected with events which occurred upon the earth is an historical religion, and must rest on human testimony. Experience teaches us that the human memory, unassisted by a contemporaneous written record, soon corrupts the impressions of past events; and this observation is especially applicable to recollections associated with religious feeling.

The doctrine that the evangelists were miraculously exempted from the effects of human infirmity can no longer be maintained by theologians, who also explain some discrepancies in the Gospels by the admission of such infirmity. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, and it is so deeply impressed with the imperfections of the earth, that the restoration of the actual history is now a hopeless task.

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORICAL TRUTH.

THE conditions of belief, and the evidences which are deemed sufficient to establish credibility, have varied in different states of civilisation, and cannot be measured by any known criterion. It has been frequently observed that the arguments which are accepted by one generation as conclusive, are set aside in a subsequent age as feeble and unsatisfactory. The forms of unbelief also change, and old difficulties require new solutions.

When however we pass on from the first mysterious history, and survey the great results, we see the divine and beneficent influence of Christianity impressed in indelible characters on the annals of the world.

The words said to have been spoken by Jesus on the shores of the lake, on the slope

of the mountain, or in his journeyings through Palestine, fermented in the human heart, stirring the deepest feelings and kindling the aspirations of mankind. These words were addressed to ignorant men, by whom their meaning was often misunderstood, and imperfectly recorded. The words were spoken however as never man spake, and they were sufficient for the purpose predicted.

They did undoubtedly convulse the world, and change the whole fabric of human society, supplying a new basis for civilisation, a new frame-work for human thought, and a new motive for human actions.

The history of all succeeding centuries testifies to these marvellous results. The overthrow of antecedent religions was the first step to a new creation, and amidst the decay of ancient creeds, and the decline of heathen communities, the dawn of a brighter era reddened the horizon.

During the darkest period of European

history, the organisation of the Church held men together when all other bonds of society were loosened, and in every subsequent age Christianity, though corrupted by human error, and distorted by human passions, has nevertheless afforded the only solid security for the permanence of European civilisation, and the only hope for man after the close of his ephemeral existence.

Thoughts thus crowded into a few sentences necessarily convey a very inadequate notion of the blessings derived from Christianity. If a person tries to imagine the condition of this country under the supposition that the Christian religion had never been bestowed upon mankind, he will find it almost impossible to realise in his mind the altered circumstances by which he would be surrounded.

The character of the nation, the laws, the institutions, the whole mind of the people would have been more changed than the wildest fancy can conceive.

The early history of Christianity may be in many respects inaccurate, exaggerated by credulous devotion, and even falsified by legendary traditions, but some divine and indefeasible truths must be contained within its doctrines. These could not have lived through so many centuries, and spread through such various forms of civilisation, if they had not their undying roots in the heart of man.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEARCH FOR DOCTRINES.

When however it is asked, what were the doctrines which produced these inestimable benefits? The reply would probably vary according to the church or sect which undertook to answer the question. Two prominent and generally acknowledged tenets of Christianity are faith in God, and charity between men. Beyond these two there is scarcely another tenet, which is not matter of controversy.

The history of Christianity is a history of heresies and schisms. From the day when the disciples left that upper chamber in Jerusalem to the present hour, Christians have never been of one accord.

A student who seeks patiently to ascertain from the first Christian teachers the precise doctrines of Christianity, directs his attention to St. Paul, as the first theologian, the first human instructor of the new religion.

Here, it is often repeated, we meet a man of like passions with ourselves, we leave the enchanted ground of the gospel narratives, and tread again upon the accustomed earth.

At the outset of this inquiry, the question presents itself: Are these epistles the genuine writings of St. Paul? Into this examination it is not proposed to enter. The Pauline theology rests upon the Pauline epistles. The most captious critics have admitted that the four chief epistles are genuine. These would suffice to establish the principles of the Pauline doctrine. The only epistle which is rejected by a concurrence of opinions is the epistle to the Hebrews.

In an impartial investigation of St. Paul's doctrines, it is desirable to rely on the general

character and spirit of his writings, rather than on any single passage or selected text.

Another difficulty arises from our ignorance of the order in which the Pauline epistles were written. It has been often observed that this knowledge would be of great value, and assist in removing obscurities which are as yet impenetrable.

St. Paul did not apparently write for the purpose of instructing future generations. His epistles were evidently intended to meet temporary difficulties, and to correct errors of doctrine or of conduct in the congregations to whom they were addressed.

The Apostle looked forward to the second coming of Christ, if not within his own lifetime, at least before many years would pass away. The boundless prospect of future Christianity was never opened to his sight, and he did not contemplate a distant posterity seeking religious instruction from letters addressed to Jewish proselytes.

For the sake of judging these epistles fairly and comprehending their purport, it would be desirable, so far as possible, to read them by the light in which they were written, and also to know something of the intellectual condition of the persons to whom they were addressed.

Throughout these writings Paul appears as the Jewish scribe, bringing forth from his treasure things new and old. His education and modes of thought were Jewish or Eastern. His acquaintance with Greek literature seems limited to such citations and proverbial phrases as may have been current in the maritime cities of Asia. His epistles exhibit no familiarity with Greek philosophy, or with the style and culture of the Greek mind.

Whatever may have been the previous education of St. Paul, it is manifest that the persons to whom he addressed his epistles must have been trained under a similar system of instruction. They must have belonged to the same school of thought; otherwise they would

not have appreciated his peculiar style of reasoning, his fanciful philosophy, and his allegorical interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures.

During the interval of more than four hundred years which elapsed between the Old and the New Testaments, important changes had occurred in the religious condition of the Hebrew race. This long period, although productive of effects which have modified the history of mankind, is not commemorated by any inspired writers whom Protestants acknowledge, and is too often therefore lost in the oblivion of ages.

In the course of these forgotten centuries numerous communities of Jews had spread themselves throughout the chief cities of the Roman empire. New forms of religious thought were more readily accepted by men, who had been long separated and estranged from their holy city, and from their ancestral language. Amongst many causes which

tended to modify the religion of the Greek Jews, the three following deserve to be specially noticed.

The Septuagint version of the Scriptures.

The Apocryphal books of the Old Testament.

The influence of the Synagogues.

CHAPTER X.

THE SEPTUAGINT.

THE influence of language upon religion, and the extent to which words have indirectly modified human beliefs, have been frequently noticed.

The translation of Hebrew expressions into Greek could not be made without in some degree altering the full meaning of the original language.

The Hebrew text was regarded by the Jews as possessing a sanctity and divine vigour unapproachable in a Greek version. This superiority is acknowledged in the prologue to the book of Ecclesiasticus, as well as in the works of Josephus.

The tradition connected with the origin of the Septuagint, proves the veneration it had obtained amongst the Greek Jews, and persons

who believed in this legend, would have deemed it impious to question the accuracy of a version composed under such supernatural guidance.

Critics free from this superstitious restraint, observe in the Septuagint many indications of an endeavour to adapt the narratives of Scripture to a later form of religious thought. Thus the interposition of Angels is substituted for the immediate intervention of the Deity, who recedes from that familiarity with man which appears in the Hebrew text. On this account it has been said, that the Septuagint rationalises.

The importance of this version is greatly enhanced by the frequent use made of it in the New Testament, and it is not unreasonable to infer that the Evangelists had a closer connexion with the Greek Jews than with their Hebrew countrymen.

Christianity seems soon after its birth to have become a Greek religion; its records were almost entirely written in Greek, and while the employment of a foreign language may have

alienated the inhabitants of Judæa, it must have conciliated the favour of Jews and proselytes in the Greek cities of Asia and of Europe.

A severance from the language of their ancestral religion facilitated further change. An analogous effect resulted from the translation of the Scripture in modern Europe. "It is a most "significant circumstance," said Macaulay, "that no large society of which the tongue "is not Teutonic has ever turned Protestant, "and that wherever a language derived from "that of ancient Rome is spoken, the religion "of modern Rome to this day prevails."

The form and force of expressions, even the gender of nouns have qualified the beliefs of mankind. The word spirit, for instance, in its passage from Jerusalem to Rome, changed its gender more than once. Feminine in Hebrew, it became neuter in Greek, and again masculine in Latin. It may be reasonably doubted whether, if the Latin term had been

female, the three persons of the Trinity would have occupied their present positions in the religious thought of Christians.

The word person has also acquired a more definite entity and inflexible meaning than its Greek equivalent, and though this may not have modified our creeds, it has certainly influenced popular notions of the divine nature.

If it is admitted that the transition from Greek to Latin, and again from Latin to the Teutonic languages, have tended imperceptibly to qualify Theological doctrines, a somewhat similar result may be suspected to have occurred under the influence of the Septuagint. Eastern ideas altered their nature when they were clothed in a Greek garb. There is however great difficulty in attaining accurate knowledge on this subject, because the translation of a word often fails to convey the meaning of the original term. For example, the words baptism, regeneration, son of man, son of God, did not originate with Christianity; never-

theless, these words, when appropriated by Christians, assumed a meaning differing in many respects from their previous Jewish signification. It is almost impossible to measure exactly the shades of difference, but we must not hastily assume that where the same terms were used, the same ideas were intended to be expressed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE APOCRYPHA.

A PROTESTANT who has been taught that the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament are of little value, is surprised to find that these books contain the first distinct indications of the legendary beliefs, and of the religious philosophy, which were subsequently incorporated in Christian theology.

Whoever wishes to study the history of religious thought, must devote his attention to these interesting writings, which, beyond their intrinsic merit, are of great importance, inasmuch as they mark a movement of the human mind from Judaism towards Christianity.

For instance, the immortality of man is announced in this rejected Apocrypha more clearly than in any book of the Old Testament.

Here also the antagonism between matter and spirit, the impurity of the whole material world, and the evil influence of the corruptible body upon the human soul, are proclaimed as unquestionable truths.

The evil spirit, who scarcely appears in the Old Testament, or is only mentioned as a subordinate agent of the Deity employed to test the virtue of the righteous, occupies in the Apocrypha a prominent position,—at one time as the subject of a popular legend, and at another as the subtle enemy of man, whose death is attributed to the envy of the devil.

A still more astonishing revelation is made in the Apocrypha respecting the impersonation of wisdom.

This mysterious personification is alluded to in other books, but in the Book of Wisdom an ideal heavenly being is delineated in terms, which inspired writers did not hesitate to borrow, and to apply to Christ.

Great perplexity has been caused by the

language of this Apocryphal author, of whom nothing is known.

The book assumes to have been written by Solomon:—a fiction, which, if ever believed, has long since been discarded. It was at one time suspected of having been fraudulently composed during the Christian era, this opinion is now no longer maintained.

In this mysterious book, Wisdom is called the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness. This Wisdom enters into the righteous man, who is then called the Son of God. Furthermore, it is stated that the righteous man is derided, examined with despitefulness and torture, and condemned to a shameful death, while the ungodly say, Let us see if his words be true, if the just man be the Son of God, He will help him and deliver him from the hands of his enemies. These sentences contain a presentiment of Christian history more lucidly

pronounced than can be found in the Hebrew Prophets.

Other Apocryphal books tend to prove that during the four hundred years which intervened between Malachi and Matthew, the Jewish mind had not been stationary, but had qualified ancient Scriptures by new interpretations. This process had been greatly accelerated by intercourse with the Greek race. Several of the Apocryphal books seem to have been first written in Greek, and although their style may be criticised as too rhetorical, yet in vigour and devotional eloquence they compare advantageously with the Pauline epistles.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SYNAGOGUES.

The Greek Synagogues must have exercised considerable influence in modifying the old Hebrew doctrines.

Jews scattered throughout the chief cities of the Roman Empire could not comply with the religion of Moses. They could neither conform to the law nor understand the language in which it was written. For them, the Synagogue had become a substitute for the Temple, and the scribe had superseded the priest.

Every Synagogue, moreover, was under the control of chosen elders,—masters in Israel. Different teachers, or expounders of Scripture, unconsciously, or designedly, introduced diversity of doctrine. Pharisees and Sadducees, though opposed to each other on questions of

fundamental importance, were alike admitted to high offices in the temple; it may therefore be reasonably conjectured that there was a similar latitude of opinion in the Synagogues of Alexandria and of Rome.

Some ingenious writers have endeavoured to trace the source of Christianity to the Schools and Synagogues of Alexandria. They would even interpret the prophecy: "Out of Egypt have I called my son," in a mystic sense.

Such fanciful notions must be discarded; but the forms of religious thought which were current amongst the Jews of Alexandria, were probably not unknown to their countrymen in Antioch and in Rome. A departure from the old creed of their fathers, an increasing propensity towards allegorical interpretations of Scripture, and an inclination to amalgamate Eastern beliefs with Greek philosophy, tended to generate a vague and mystic latitude of thought on the nature of the Deity.

Such liberty of religious opinion must have prevailed amongst the Jews who concurred in sending Philo to Rome as the representative of his countrymen on a question connected with the Jewish religion.

This diversity of doctrines probably facilitated the entrance of St. Paul's theology. He found the harvest ripe for the sickle; and the Greek Synagogues were the fields wherein he was specially qualified to win over converts to Christianity. His attachment to the traditions, his frequent reference to Jewish Scriptures, his system of typical interpretations, and his style of reasoning, could only have been effective amongst men who had been previously accustomed to hear their Scriptures allegorised, and who heard from Paul an exposition of doctrines not unknown in their schools.

We cannot now ascertain what were the predominant doctrines in the Synagogues of the dispersion, but there are grounds for suspecting that the space travelled over, from

the Temple to the Greek Synagogue, was nearly as wide as from the Synagogue to the Church.

The three subjects here so concisely noticed are deserving of far more attention than has been usually accorded to them in the introductions to the Pauline Theology.

In the midst of more pressing questions, it would be here impossible to discuss them satisfactorily.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSY.

"After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers," said St. Paul.

Paul was the first heresiarch, the bold innovator, the fierce controversialist. He boasted of his contest with the chief Apostles, to whom he would not give way, no not for an hour. They seemed, he says, to be pillars or seemed to be somewhat, but it made no matter to him.

These chief Apostles offered him a compromise, suggesting that they should teach the Jews, and that Paul should teach his Christianity to the Gentiles. Subsequently however when Peter came to Antioch, an open rupture occurred between these two Apostles. Paul withstood Peter to his face, blaming him before

the assembled congregation. So violent was this dissension and so bitter the animosity which it engendered, that after the lapse of many years Paul adverts to it with unabated rancour, and fixes on Peter, for all futurity, the grave charge of dissimulation.

Are we to infer from the statement of St. Paul that the chief Apostles and their disciples at Jerusalem had been teaching and practising, during some twenty years, an imperfect Christianity, piecing out, it has been said, Aaron's old garment with the new cloth? The men who should have been pillars of Christ's church, were it seems still strict Jews, diligently attending the sacrifices in the temple, and adhering to the laws and customs of Moses.

The hostility to St. Paul arose not from his acceptance of Christianity but from his repudiation of Judaism. While the older Apostles were living undisturbed at Jerusalem, combining a belief in Christ with a daily observance

of the Jewish law, Paul had broken loose from the law, and openly proclaimed that its obligations even for the Hebrew race were now at an end, that the law itself was a miserable bondage, burdensome in this life, and useless in the life to come.

This conflict lasted apparently throughout the residue of St. Paul's life. His Epistles prove the hatred of his adversaries, and the success of their efforts. They impugned his apostleship, they disparaged his doctrine, and vilified his character. They sent missionaries to counteract his teaching. They rejoiced over his imprisonment, and added affliction to his bonds.

Thus he lived to see the defection of the churches which he had planted, and the relapse to a Jewish Christianity of the adherents whom he had instructed. "All they which are in Asia," he complains, "be turned away from me."

This apostacy from his doctrine appears to have been prevalent towards the close of his

life, when, as he says, "the time of my departure is at hand."

There are moreover many indications that after the Apostle's earthly career was closed, rival Christians reviled his memory, and held up his doctrine to scorn and reprobation.

This controversy in the early church necessarily qualifies our belief in apostolic inspiration. Those persons, who maintain that the Apostles were miraculously endowed with all knowledge essential to the promulgation of Christianity, must equally deny history and controvert Scripture. The Apostles were, it is said, men of like passions with ourselves; it must also be admitted that they were men of like limited knowledge. We see in their vehemence the tongues of fire, but we look in vain for the holy inspiration.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HORÆ PAULINÆ.

Among the numerous works written by the clergy treating of the life and of the doctrines of St. Paul, it is difficult to name one which candidly admits the striking discrepancies between the Pauline Epistles and the Acts.

The Horæ Paulinæ of Paley will serve to prove the justice of this observation, and as this book is an argumentative treatise addressed to the calm reason of the Protestant reader, it is fairly open to the criticism which it invites.

Paley assumes, for the purpose of his argument, that the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul were accidentally discovered in an old Spanish library, and he then proceeds to examine and compare them with the view of ascertaining how far many insigni-

ficant and undesigned coincidences in each work prove these books to be founded on facts, or to be, as he says, in the main true. Of course Paley arrives at the sound orthodox conclusion which is expected from an English divine.

If however later critics, pursuing a similar system of inquiry, have arrived at a somewhat different conclusion, they cannot fairly be blamed and stigmatised as rationalists. The question at issue is, which view receives the strongest confirmation from the documents themselves?

In examining these portions of Scripture with the same freedom which Paley assumes, it seems reasonable to give priority to the Epistles, in as much as the letters of a trustworthy man are better evidence of his actions and opinions than the recollections of a biographer.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EPISTLES CONTRADICT THE ACTS.

ST. PAUL attached, apparently, great importance to the assertion that he did not receive his Gospel from man, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. In support of this assertion, he emphatically states that he conferred not with flesh and blood, nor went to Jerusalem to the Apostles, but went into Arabia.

After three years, he says, he went to Jerusalem, and abode with Peter, as he carefully adds, for fifteen days. During this period he only saw Peter and James.

This special reference to dates awakens a suspicion that Paul's Christian doctrine had been ascribed to human invention, and that St. Paul was intent on refuting this assertion.

Now this assertion is distinctly made by the author of the Acts, who states that Paul, after

his conversion, received his baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost from Ananias, at Damascus. This book further adds, that Paul being compelled to fly from Damascus, came to Jerusalem, and assayed to join himself to the disciples, but they were afraid of him. Barnabas, however, brought Paul to the Apostles, and "he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

In order to connect Paul still more closely with the Apostles, this book states that "Paul showed first unto them of Damascus and Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles."

St. Paul explicitly denies this, and declares before God, that after the fifteen days at Jerusalem, he came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa.

According to Paul's Epistles, seventeen years had elapsed after his conversion before he had any intercourse with the church at Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE DIFFICULTIES.

As the history proceeds the inconsistencies and contradictions between the statements in the Epistles and in the Acts become more marked. The vision seen by Peter, the decree of the Church at Jerusalem, and the subsequent conduct of Peter at Antioch have perplexed the harmonists of these conflicting narratives. When Peter came to Antioch he had been preaching the Gospel for a period of eighteen or twenty years. What Gospel had he preached? Jesus had, it is said, commanded his disciples to go and teach all nations. For this purpose the abolition of national distinctions, of ceremonial observances, of clean and unclean meats, had been repeatedly enforced in his discourses, and copiously illustrated in his

parables. Moreover, this teaching is said to have been miraculously recalled to the memory of the Apostles.

Locke tried to explain these discrepancies, and Paley, after admitting that Locke's explanation was unsatisfactory, suggested another which is even more objectionable.

Peter must have forgotten the teaching of his Divine Master, the doctrine inculcated in his own vision, and the decree of the church said to have been inspired by the Holy Ghost. Paul also must have been ignorant of the precepts of Jesus, which would have sustained and justified the Pauline gospel more effectually than the laboured arguments in his Epistles.

The difficulties of such suppositions can only be removed by assuming that these books are not free from human error.

CHAPTER XVII.

PAUL'S LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

According to the Pauline Epistles, St. Paul had written elaborate letters, in order to prove that by the deeds of the law no man could be justified, that henceforth there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, and that the law was altogether superseded and abrogated by faith in Christ. This is fairly admitted by Paley to have been the doctrine or gospel taught by St. Paul.

According to the Acts, Paul, on his arrival at Jerusalem, in compliance with the suggestion of James and of the elders, consented to exhibit himself as a strict Jew.

It is stated that he joined himself to certain Jews who had taken vows, and that Paul took, or pretended to have taken, a similar vow,

attended the services, joined in the sacrifices of the temple, and purified himself under the Jewish law.

Are we then to believe that Paul was a second time an apostate? Could he thus have belied his own gospel, and the teaching of his whole apostolic life? Paul had reprimanded Peter and Barnabas for their dissimulation; was he now himself a dissembler?

It must be admitted, that a public act, performed with the design of conveying false notions of his religion, had morally the same guilt as a falsehood spoken for the purpose of deception. Could Paul thus have returned to the beggarly elements which he had so scornfully repudiated?

The reader is shocked at the conduct here ascribed in the Acts to St. Paul. If he turns to the Horæ Paulinæ, he is shocked at the defence suggested by Paley. This apologist for St. Paul admits that this incident in the history is perplexing. He cannot deny that

the Apostle had proclaimed the abrogation of the law even for Jews themselves, but he ventures to hint that Paul complied upon this occasion with the Jewish law from a love of tranquillity or an unwillingness to give offence!

The life and labours of the Apostle might have exempted him from such an imputation. Paul had declared: "If I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ." Paul had struggled through perils and privations, undeterred by the persecution of the Jews, and the still more envenomed hatred of rival Christians; and yet after this life of suffering, he is supposed to have repudiated the distinctive principles of his Gospel, from an unwillingness to give offence.

An English clergyman in the enjoyment of a lucrative benefice, with a pleasing prospect of promotion, may be pardoned if he yields some of his opinions for the sake of tranquillity, —but he should not measure St. Paul by his own standard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ST. PAUL AT ROME.

BIBLICAL critics have exercised great ingenuity in their endeavours to reconcile Paul's visit to Rome as related in the Acts with the language of the Pauline Epistles; without however referring to other difficulties, the prominent objection to the narrative in the Acts consists in its incompatibility with the moral character and truthfulness of St. Paul.

When the Apostle visited Rome he had taught his doctrines during many years in Asia and in Europe. There is no reason for supposing that his oral teaching differed from his written instructions. On the contrary, there are good grounds for believing that all his sufferings had been caused by his conscientious sincerity.

Paul, as is manifest from his Epistles, had declared that the law of Moses afforded no means of salvation, that its obligations had ceased even for Jews, and that the old religion had been superseded by the new faith. He had even said of the Jewish nation, "they please not God and are contrary to all men."

Nevertheless, if we are to believe the Acts, Paul on his arrival at Rome calls the chief Jews together, and commences his address by saying that "he had committed nothing against the people or the customs of their fathers."

It is impossible to believe that the writer of the Pauline Epistles could have made that statement.

Paul's doctrine was incompatible with the customs of their fathers, and was directed to the subversion of the Jewish religion.

The conduct ascribed to St. Paul is indeed not only unworthy of an Apostle, but it is accompanied by details incomprehensible

when considered in connexion with his whole previous life.

These Jews, it is said, knew nothing of Paul, and had never heard of Christianity, except as of a religion "everywhere spoken against." Nevertheless they listened to Paul patiently while he was expounding the kingdom of God from morning until evening. At the conclusion of his discourse some, it is related, believed, and some believed not. This incomplete success so far offended Paul that he denounced his auditory in vehement invectives borrowed from the Hebrew prophets.

Did these Jews deserve such reprehension? The man who addressed them was a culprit, awaiting his trial as a turbulent offender against the peace of Judæa. The doctrines which he taught had been condemned by those who sat in Moses' seat. All legitimate presumptions were therefore against Paul. On the other hand, he offered them no credentials of his apostolic authority; no manifestations

of that glorious kingdom, which they, in common with their countrymen, expected to inaugurate the coming of the Son of David.

Were these Jews culpable because they preferred to abide by the decision of the supreme council at Jerusalem? In such circumstances some hesitation was pardonable, and of all living men Paul was the last who should thus have condemned his countrymen.

Did no painful reminiscence of Stephen's fate and of his own obduracy recur to Paul's memory, and suggest some forbearance towards men, whom no heavenly voice had instructed, and whom no celestial vision had enlightened?

Could Paul thus have accused his kinsmen of blindness, without recalling the time when the scales had not yet fallen from his own eyes, and when he himself was a blasphemer and a persecutor?

Assuredly the book of the Acts bears false witness against a Christian Apostle.

CHAPTER XIX.

GAMALIEL.

THE moral difficulty arising from the acceptance of the Acts as an accurate history, suggests other suspicions.

In the Acts Paul is represented saying that he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. In the Epistles Paul boasts of his connection with the Pharisees, but does not mention Gamaliel.

According to the Acts Gamaliel, a man learned in the Jewish law, addressed the supreme tribunal on a question of law, which was then of momentous import.

The law of Moses allowed no toleration of teachers, who spoke to turn the people from the Lord their God. No worker of wonders, no prophet, although his words might come to

pass, could be exempted from the punishment due to this offence.

The law was of divine obligation, it was peremptory, the penalty was death. The obvious question was whether the Apostles had incurred this penalty? Gamaliel however altogether evaded this question, and in lieu of expounding the law, he offered to the Council arguments which contravened the law.

His reasoning afforded a defence for any heretical teacher, and recalls the advice found in Herodotus, "ὁ τι δει γενεσθαι εκ του θεου αμηχανον αποτρεψαι ανθρωπω."

If such was the doctrine of Gamaliel, it must be admitted that Paul had not profited in this part of his instructions. As a Jewish zealot, and as a Christian Apostle, Paul was equally intolerant of any doctrine contrary to his own belief. He did not even exhibit the qualified leniency, which Josephus ascribes to the sect of the Pharisees.

CHAPTER XX.

STEPHEN.

THE speech of Gamaliel is perplexing as coming from a man learned in the Jewish law, but the speech of Stephen is full of incomprehensible anomalies.

Stephen, it is said, was a man practised in argumentative discussion, and unrivalled amongst the disputants of the synagogues. He had the opportunity of addressing the supreme council in defence of Christianity. The moment was peculiarly favourable for such an appeal. Jerusalem, it is stated, was crowded with converts and adherents of the new faith;—not only the uneducated people, but a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. An eminent member of the Council had lately advised moderation

towards this new sect. Stephen could not deny the jurisdiction of men who sat in Moses' seat; and the reader of the open Bible feels confident that before such a tribunal, the vindication of Christianity will be complete.

In all subsequent ages, from the end of the first century to the present hour, the advocates of Christianity have appealed to the miracles performed, and to the witnesses who testified to these divine manifestations.

When Stephen addressed the Council, these witnesses were around him. Many who were then sitting in judgment must have seen the portentous signs attending the crucifixion: the darkened sun and the trembling earth; the bodies of the saints which arose from their graves, and appeared in the streets of Jerusalem; the veil of the temple miraculously rent in twain; the supernatural events more recently offered for their conviction; the bursting of the prison doors and the release of the apostles. These were, however, insig-

nificant proofs of divine power compared with the conclusive miracle.

Five hundred brethren could now have testified that they had themselves seen Jesus risen from the dead: a fact too well attested to admit of any doubt, and too decisive to admit of any refutation.

These topics, which have for eighteen hundred years furnished arguments in defence of Christianity, were neglected while the witnesses were yet living.

Stephen did not even explain the Gospel, which it is said he had expounded in the synagogues with such irresistible force.

Instead of addressing himself to the questions which had convulsed Jewish society, and were soon to turn the world upside down, he rambles over the migration of Abraham, and the familiar histories of Joseph and Moses. When it might have been expected that he would show the connexion between ancient dispensations and recent events, he breaks off

in bitter invectives, accuses the Council of transgressing the law, and of resisting the Holy Ghost.

Upon the not unnatural remonstrance of the Council, his ecstacy commences, and he declares that the Divine nature of Christ was miraculously revealed to him.

The disciples, according to the statement of the Evangelists, had a promise of special assistance whenever they should be summoned before human tribunals. In Stephen's case, no such aid seems to have been afforded. The able disputant of the synagogues neither justified his doctrine by the law, nor did he venture to assert that the law had been superseded by a more glorious revelation. In addressing the Sanhedrin, his citations from Scripture should have been derived from the Hebrew text, whereas they seem to have been obtained from some paraphrase or imperfect Targum.

The Council sat in Moses' seat, and they

were acting according to a law, which they believed to be divine, and which Stephen acknowledged. His anger was unjustifiable, and his vindication of Christianity lamentably feeble.

This speech has however the character of authenticity.

The author of the Acts, if he had not adhered to traditions, could undoubtedly have composed a more effective speech in defence of Christianity.

Writing with the acquired knowledge of a later age, he could have described Stephen overwhelming the Sanhedrin with ancient prophecies and recent miracles.

This speech, moreover, in its concluding words indicates that the first martyr was in advance of the apostles.

Stephen was put to death, probably in a tumultuous outbreak; many disciples fled, but the Apostles, it is said, remained at Jerusalem, frequenting the temple daily, and probably joining in the sacrifices.

The undisturbed residence of the Apostles at Jerusalem, after the death of Stephen, seems to countenance an opinion suggested by some learned critics, that the Apostles did not altogether adopt Stephen's view of Christianity. The fragments of history which we possess indicate that the Primitive Church at Jerusalem remained under the bondage of the law.

The transition from Judaism to Christianity was a more gradual development of religious thought than is commonly supposed.

Stephen's vision was a prophetic anticipation of future Christianity. It was the germ of a new faith; the immature embryo of a belief, which was destined to subdue the civilised world.

CHAPTER XXI.

LEGENDARY HISTORY.

St. Paul's description of the gift of tongues directly refutes the statement in the Acts. This contradiction produces an irresistible impression that the Epistles record the actual occurrence, while the Acts commemorate the legendary tradition. This discrepancy casts additional doubt upon other portions of the book.

Paley observes that in the Epistles Paul expresses the affectionate feelings, the limited knowledge, and the restricted power belonging to man; he regrets the illness of one friend whom he is obliged to leave sick in the midst of a journey, and he gratefully rejoices over the recovery of another, the issue of whose illness he could not foresee.

In order to reconcile this language with the marvellous cures recorded in the Acts, Paley intimates that the Apostles had not at all times the power of working miracles, nor even the means of obtaining that power.

Paley is forced into this supposition by his desire to uphold a legendary history; but if the book of the Acts is to be believed, a handkerchief or an apron sent from Paul would at once have healed Epaphroditus, and restored him both to his duties and to his friend.

These legends furnished a scriptural sanction for the relics and miraculous amulets of subsequent centuries. The careful study of the Pauline Epistles leads to the rejection of these fanciful or exaggerated narratives.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RAY OF LIGHT.

CHRISTIANITY was preached and promulgated by men struggling amidst poverty and affliction, against contempt and persecution. By their self-devotion, their untiring zeal, their patience and their faith, they constrained an unwilling world at first to listen, and at last to believe.

Their mission was not a march of triumph, where astonished and obsequious multitudes thronged around them to share their marvellous gifts, and to witness their supernatural powers.

In the Acts these legendary wonders may be seen, but the Epistles of St. Paul present a less miraculous though more truthful picture. His ministry appears as a continued martyrdom. He refers to sufferings and imprison-

ments, which no miracles had intervened to mitigate. No prison gates fly open to release him; no jailer falls as a supplicant at his feet; no magistrates humbly beseech him to depart. For him nature did not suspend her course. Roman governors did not tremble at his presence. The days of Ambrose and of Hildebrand had not yet arrived.

In weariness and in painfulness Paul pursues his way, sustained only by the unfaltering faith which animated his whole existence: "The Lord," he says, "stood by me, and strengthened me."

The book of the Acts cannot be received as an accurate history of the events which it records. When Paley argues that it appears to be "in the main" true; the question may be answered according to the meaning attached to these words.

There is abundant evidence that the author or compiler of the Acts had collected many traditions relating to St. Paul. These tra-

ditions were fluctuating and uncertain; if we may judge from the three narratives of the Apostle's conversion,—since these are all found to differ in some details.

Learned critics have suggested that the object of this book was to effect a compromise between the two divergent doctrines, and to reconcile the followers of Paul with the Judaising Christians.

With such a view, the author would omit the dissension between these Apostles, and he would endeavour to assimilate their doctrines and their powers, representing one Apostle as the counterpart of the other.

There are several objections to the adoption of this solution, which need not here be discussed.

The reader, who has carefully considered the contradictions between the statements in the Acts and the language in the Epistles, is irresistibly impressed with a suspicion—that if we now possessed a similar authentic

criterion, by which to test the narratives in the Gospels, our opinion of those books would be qualified, while our knowledge would be more complete.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PAULINE THEOLOGY.

"Ex divinorum et humanorum male sanâ admixtione non solum educitur philosophia phantastica, sed etiam religio hæretica."

LOCKE observes in the preface to his paraphrase of the Pauline Epistles, "We may still see in this day how every man's philosophy regulates his interpretation of the word of God."

In the Jewish mind religion and philosophy were indissolubly blended. The Hebrew Scriptures were supposed to contain a vast scheme of recondite philosophy, which could be unfolded by learned men under the assistance of Divine favour. This philosophy colours the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, and had apparently imbued the traditions of

the Jewish schools. On this subject the statements of Josephus must be received with caution, inasmuch as he wished to give to Jewish beliefs the complexion of Greek philosophy.

St. Paul had, as he states, profited in the religion of the Jews; his frame of mind was moulded in the schools of the Pharisees, and he was zealous of the traditions.

A man can never entirely divest himself of the forms of thought and of feeling, which belong to his age and country. Paul's Christianity did not release him from his Jewish prepossessions; and his philosophy is so intermixed with his religious doctrine, that it is almost impossible to accept his theology without also accepting his philosophy as divine.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PAULINE PHILOSOPHY.

THE Eastern philosophy which had, during some centuries preceding the Christian era, insinuated itself into the Jewish mind, pretended to solve problems left in obscurity by the earlier Hebrew Scriptures.

Amongst these the origin of evil was propounded as the basis of a philosophical religion. Matter, which included the whole terrestrial and animal world, was from its nature evil, and was opposed to spirit, which was beneficent, pure, and celestial. These two antagonist principles were thought to explain the anomalies of the visible world, and to unriddle the perplexities of human existence.

St. Paul was not careful in his use of words, as will be shown more fully hereafter, and this indistinctness confuses his philosophy, but it

seems that he had adopted the doctrine of the Apocryphal Scripture as an undeniable truth. He taught that the material world animate and inanimate was alike impure, and under the dominion of an evil principle. The whole creation, he said, groaneth and travaileth in pain; it is subject to Satan, who is the God of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the enemy of man, and the adversary of Christ.

In immediate connection with this scheme of religious philosophy, Paul had also adopted a theory concerning the nature of man.

The English language has no equivalent words to express the subdivision of man's nature as represented in the Pauline Epistles. The Greek language might have furnished the means of expressing these qualities, but Paul does not carefully attend to the distinction which he indicates. The system is necessarily rendered more obscure by this want of precision.

Man's nature is said to consist of,—

The body or the flesh, σωμα.

The animating principle of earthly life, ψυχη.

The intellect or understanding, νους.

The spirit or divine principle, πνευμα.

According to this philosophy, the body and the animating principle of the body were altogether evil, sensual and subject to the devil.

On the other hand the spirit is not invariably pure and holy; because there are unclean and wicked spirits. The same word is used for the heavenly and for the devilish spirit.

This system of philosophy constitutes the basis of the Pauline theology. On this is founded the displeasure of the Deity, the necessity of redemption, and the mystery of the atonement.

It becomes daily more difficult to admit that while the basis is composed of human materials, the superstructure is altogether divine.

"Ne decipiamur per inanem philosophiam."

CHAPTER XXV.

RIVAL CREEDS.

THIS system of philosophy was not warranted by the religion of Moses. It was obviously incompatible with the doctrine of temporal rewards and punishments. A creed which assigned earthly happiness as the recompense of piety, could not also teach that earthly felicities were altogether impure. The Deity could not be divided against himself, or bestow upon the righteous those rewards which were the chief ingredients of sin.

We may reasonably doubt whether Jesus taught his disciples that this Eastern philosophy was a Divine truth. He did not apparently say of little children,—the unbaptized infants, that they were inherently vicious, and unfit for heaven. Again, the beautiful prayer which is

associated with his name says, in simple words: "Lead us not into temptation;" thus leaving no place for the evil spirit, and depriving the tempter of his traditional employment.

St. Paul could not escape from the endless inconsistencies arising from a theological philosophy, which controverted the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, while at one time he describes the devil as the god of this world, he elsewhere asserts that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. So he writes to the Ephesians, "God is above you all, and through you all, and in you all;" whilst he tells the Romans, "In the flesh dwelleth no good thing." Here the Apostle seems to have felt the contradiction, and therefore adds, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit."

This qualification creates a new confusion, since Paul elsewhere speaks of himself as abiding in the flesh, meaning thereby, living on the earth, without including the secondary signification of the word flesh.

The whole religious instruction, and even the moral precepts of St. Paul, were distorted by the incongruous combination of the Mosaic law with Eastern philosophy.

He promises, for instance, that women who continue in faith and charity, shall be saved in child-bearing; since however he represents this world as a prison, from which it is better to depart, the promise appears to be an unsatisfactory recompense.

Again, when the Apostle censures the conduct of evil-doers at Corinth, and adds, "for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep;" this language refers to the Jewish law, the beggarly elements, from which he could not liberate his mind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MODERN CONCLUSIONS.

THE philosophy of St. Paul, respecting the inherent wickedness of the material world, and the associated belief in the impersonation of evil, have now passed away, together with the popular legends of diabolic possession.

The devil and his works have been renounced in a more peremptory manner than even the Catechism requires.

The most orthodox divine would not now propose to put Satan into the Christian creed, yet a belief in the personal existence and continued agency of Satan is the necessary preliminary for theological doctrines.

In modern literature, the personification of evil is a figurative mode of speech, equally

applicable to other metaphorical existences, as for instance, to love, or wisdom, or death.

Ancient nations gave to these and other personifications a vivid reality, which to our minds is almost incomprehensible. Examples of such beliefs, in classical authors, will occur to every scholar. Christian writers, indeed, often taunted the Pagans with such superstitions.

"Desine, si pudor est, Gentilis ineptia, tandem
Res incorporeas simulatis fingere membris."

These writers did not perceive the beam which obscured their own eyesight, while they were pointing with scorn at the deified abstractions of Heathen idolatry.

It must be admitted that neither the Gospel legends nor the Pauline philosophy afford any assistance in solving the difficulty of reconciling the existence of evil with a beneficent and all-powerful Deity.

There is, on this subject, a passage cited, it is said, from the works of Athanasius, which deserves attention:—

"It is an heresy to attribute a real nature and essence to evil; for those who hold this doctrine must either believe that God is the maker and cause of evil, or else they must suppose that evil hath a nature and entity of itself independent of God. Whereas it is equally untrue that anything exists of which God is not the cause, and also that He, who is the essence of all goodness, should be the creator of evil."

This opinion again, although it is said to originate from a saint, might lead to a dangerous heresy; since the assertion that evil hath no real nature and essence, might induce a belief that there is no such thing as evil; —a theory which undermines the foundation of all morality.

This theory was maintained by Soame Jenyns, and ably criticised by Dr. Johnson, in an essay, which will repay the perusal.

After wandering through this maze of legend, of philosophy, of history, and of criticism, re-

lating to the source of evil, to the devil and his works,—the conclusion is, that all these doctrines belong to the imaginations of men, and cannot be ascribed to the word of God.

Vade Satana.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ST. PAUL'S STYLE OF WRITING.

PRECISION of speech is essential to accurate reasoning: it becomes far more important when a sentence has the authority of law, but its value is immeasurably enhanced, when the expression claims to be received as the word of God.

The doctrines announced by St. Paul are unfortunately obscured and confused by the indistinctness of his language. The Apostle employs the same word in a variety of senses, so that his meaning can only be conjectured from the context.

Thus the words life, death, body, flesh, spirit, heaven, law, faith, charity, and many others have no fixed signification attached to them. The Apostle nevertheless hurries along in his argument, without noticing that the

word has acquired a new meaning, and is no longer an equivalent for the previous thought.

There is scarcely a single passage in the Pauline Epistles, or a single doctrine in the Pauline theology, which is not darkened or embroiled by the ambiguity of the expressions.

Let the reader reflect for a moment on the word "body;" what scenes of mental and physical torture does that word recall. Modern society turns away with feelings of humiliation and disgust from the perusal of cruelties which Catholics and Protestants did not hesitate to inflict on one another, for a supposed misunderstanding of that equivocal word.

The echo of the old controversy may indeed still be heard in the same Gothic aisles where it resounded long ago, while brave old Latimer was lighting that candle, which, with God's help, will never be put out.

St. Paul could not have foreseen the human suffering which has resulted from his careless

use of that deadly word; and it is difficult to believe that any divine or merciful influence guided his pen.

The Apostle had a difficulty to contend with for which, if he were a mere human teacher, great allowance should be made. The Greek language, though unequalled in power and pliability of phrase, had not as yet been adapted to convey the mystic tenets of the Pauline theology. A new science requires a new vocabulary, and during this period of infancy, the Christian creed could only stutter in the language of a heathen race.

Many examples of this imperfection could be cited. The word charity may suffice. This Christian virtue is rendered in Greek by two different words, but neither of the two can fully express the comprehensive meaning attached by Christians to the word charity. The notion of charity had not yet been naturalised in human language.

The carelessness with which St. Paul intro-

duces citations from the Jewish scriptures increases the perplexity of his writings. This inaccuracy is the more inexplicable, because he occasionally rests his argument on the letter of the text cited. The Pauline Epistles introduce passages of scripture so heedlessly intermixed that the learned Lightfoot could only explain the Apostle's citations by saying; "it is no rare thing but the common usage of the Holy Ghost to vary from the original in the recital of passages well enough known before."

To modern readers Lightfoot's explanation appears irreverent, and they would rather ascribe such inaccuracies to human infirmity than to divine usage.

Every Christian sect is still embarrassed by the confusion arising from St. Paul's style. Our creeds and formularies are based, indeed the whole scheme of Christian theology rests on the belief, that an holy effluence not only modulated the tone of the Apostle's mind, but

guarded his pen from error, and tempered every word to be the exact dictation of inspired truth.

This doctrine can no longer be maintained by any educated Protestant, and it becomes daily more difficult to uphold a structure, of which the foundations have been undermined.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PAULINE ALLEGORIES.

"Qui talia legit,
Quid didicit tandem, quid scit, nisi somnia, nugas?"

It is not necessary to enter into the general subject of allegory as a vehicle for religious thought. The several gradations from typical actions to figurative expressions, and to metaphorical language, may be traced in many parts of Scripture Inward emotions can only find utterance in metaphorical phrases, and the words employed to glorify the attributes of the Deity were necessarily typical.

Many allegorical interpretations of the older creed are found in the Septuagint version. The Apocryphal books also furnish examples of the mode in which the Divine Word, like the manna of the wilderness, could thus con-

tent every man's delight, and temper itself to every man's liking.

This system of interpretation had become a special study in the Jewish schools. The verbal sanctity of the Holy volume was hereby preserved, while its texture was made to reflect a thousand lights, according to the ingenuity of the teacher or the requirements of the age.

The extent to which some at least of the Jewish Synagogues had departed from the literal meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures, may be conjectured from the writings of Philo. This author retained the confidence and respect of his countrymen, although he treated their Sacred history as a collection of typical narratives, valuable only in illustrating allegorical views of religious truth.

The Synagogues to whom Paul addressed his Epistles, must have been imbued with similar notions, otherwise Paul's fantastic transformations would have shocked their devotional feelings.

Abraham, Paul writes, had two sons,—the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman; he who was of a bondswoman was born of the flesh, but he of the freewoman was by promise: which things, Paul adds, are an allegory (or are allegorised), for these are the two covenants; the one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage,—which is Agar, for this Agar is Mount Sinai, in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is.

It seems needless to cite further from this allegory, where a woman typifies a mountain, and the mountain typifies a town, and the town typifies a divine covenant. After all this confusion of types, the allegory fails, as commentators remark, in the very point which it was adduced to illustrate; since, according to Scripture, the son of the bondswoman and his posterity were free from the law, whereas Isaac's descendants—the children of promise—became the slaves of the law.

Philo, it has been observed, indulges in an

allegory very similar to St. Paul's. He represents Hagar, the bondmaid, as the type of worldly wisdom, whom the Patriarch abandons for Sarah, the emblem of heavenly knowledge.

The fanciful allusions of Philo may be rejected as Jewish fables. Are Protestants expected to receive Paul's allegories as the Word of God?

Again, in writing to convince the church of Corinth that Pastors are entitled to support from their congregations, Paul cites from the law, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox," and then asks: "Doth God care for oxen?" Here the Apostle discards the literal sense as unworthy of the Deity, and by parity of reasoning (if reason can be applied to such writings), he overthrows a large portion of the Mosaic law.

Cicero, in his book De naturâ Deorum, argues in a similar manner that God could not have made the world except for man. Cujusnam causâ tantarum rerum molitio facta sit: arborum et herbarum? at id quidem absurdum est. An bestiarum? nihilo probabilius, deos mutarum et nihil intelligentium causâ tantum laborasse.

The Scriptural prohibition against ploughing with an ox and an ass together, was probably in the recollection of Paul when he wrote, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers?"

These typical interpretations of Scripture must suggest to every thoughtful reader the change which had come over the Jewish mind in regard to their Holy volume.

Could Paul have held the Scripture to be, according to the modern meaning, the Word of God, whilst he thus distorted its obvious sense? These questions awaken consideration. Another and far more momentous question presents itself, when we perceive that Paul did not hesitate to apply these allegories to Christ himself.

Even in this early age of the Church, wild notions were broached respecting the earthly life of Jesus, his corporeal reality, and the resurrection. Heretics moved curious questions,—or, as Bacon says: made strange anatomies of the nature and person of Christ.

At such a time, therefore, careful precision of thought, and studied propriety of language, might have been expected from an Apostle. Paul must have been anxious to confirm the new converts in their beliefs, and to check the propagation of error. Nevertheless, his Epistle to the Corinthians tells them, "Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink,—for they drank of that rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ."

All commentators admit that there was a rabbinical legend of the rock, which had been struck by Moses, following the Israelites, and thus affording them a perennial supply of water in their passage through the desert.

To blend and confuse the holy name of Christ with a fable tended necessarily to destroy all certainty of his existence, unless some further explanation was annexed.

The allusion was indeed perilous, when it is

remembered that there was an ideal logos, a metaphysical abstraction, which Paul thus rashly identified with the Lord Jesus.

This allegory becomes again more incomprehensible when it is observed that the doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus was thus announced to the Corinthians, in connexion with a fabled phantom of the desert.

It appears as if the Apostle had been fascinated by the typical resemblance between an old Jewish legend and the vivid conception of Christ, ever present to his mind. The moving rock seemed to him equally true with the recent history of Jesus. The ideal and the real were not distinguishable; both were spectral forms vividly impressed on his imagination. They were accepted as spiritual or internal truths, outweighing all the visible and material realities around him.

A modern reader cannot comprehend a mental condition in which two notions so entirely different could be identified as one and

the same. Religious thought assumes different forms in various minds, and changes its shape as seen through the atmosphere of an enthusiastic imagination.

Meanwhile, Protestants searching for definite doctrines and historical facts, cannot allow these legends of the Jewish schools, and fictions of rabbinical tradition, to usurp the position and the authority of the oracles of God.

Insomnia vana valete.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PREDESTINATION.

ST. PAUL boasts of his connexion with the sect of the Pharisees. He could not have heard the traditions of the Divine censure of this sect, or he would have qualified this self-laudation and the pride of his educational training.

The Pharisees, according to Josephus, believed in fate or predestination: but not so entirely as to preclude freewill in men, or to nullify the use of prayer for Divine intervention.

This statement proves that the Pharisees did not know what to believe on this inexplicable subject.

St. Paul, so far as we can judge from his Epistles, had not more knowledge in this

matter than other Pharisees. He, however, reproduces their philosophy and gives to their inconsistent theories his apostolic sanction. Thus at one time he cites the metaphorical illustration of the potter and his clay, justifies a capricious selection, and says that he himself was chosen from his birth for his appointed task. At another time he proclaims "glory, honour and peace to every man that worketh good, for there is no respect of persons with God."

The traditions of Jewish history favoured the belief in a capricious selection. The Jews were proud of being the chosen people, and from Abraham downwards, selection, even in some cases before birth, had been the supposed system of Divine government.

The spirit and principles of Christianity lead to an opposite conclusion. The language of Jesus seems also to have refuted the pretensions of the Jews, and depreciated their boasted descent from Abraham.

The doctrine of election however flatters spiritual pride, and enables a certain class of Christians to look down on their brethren with contemptuous commiseration; on this account the doctrine is much cherished.

The moral influence of belief in predestination would be pernicious, if speculative beliefs always governed human conduct, but experience warrants us in saying that men who profess a belief in predestination, are neither better nor worse than their neighbours.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SACRIFICE.

"Receptum ferme ubique ut humani sanguine Dii placarentur."——— *Grotius de relig.*

"It is blood which maketh an atonement for the soul."

"Without shedding of blood there is no remission."

Thus Leviticus had pronounced, and the Epistle to the Hebrews echoed the sanguinary sentence.

St. Paul sanctioned the same doctrine, connecting it with the crucifixion.

Yet it would seem that a more beneficent doctrine had been proclaimed by a higher authority. Obedience had been preferred to sacrifice; and Jesus was reported to have said

"Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Are we to believe that these words were spoken at a time when the most appalling sacrifice was immediately required? Is this the doctrine of the Cross? How can it be said that the flesh profits nothing, when we are equally taught that the flesh profited everything?

This mysterious subject awakens deep reflection. Man is the creature of the past, and he cannot release himself from the inherited conditions of his nature. Every word in human language has its pedigree; every thought in the human mind has its parentage. When man's religious feelings are excited, his imagination unconsciously reverts to antecedent impressions of superstitious terror. Forms of belief that had died away rise up again in shadowy similitude, and haunt his mind with visions of an angry God demanding from the feeble half reasoning beings whom he has

created, an atonement for their imperfections.

Is this doctrine a Divine mystery? May it not be a relic of idolatry, raked out of the embers of an extinguished creed, and ignorantly raised on high in the sanctuary of the Christian God?

According to the Pauline theology, man by his descent from Adam had incurred the penalty of eternal death, but by the sacrifice of Jesus man was released from this penalty, on condition of his believing in Jesus.

At the period when Paul proclaimed this doctrine many disciples were still living who had accompanied Jesus in his wanderings, following him day by day to listen to his holy words, to imbibe, if possible, something of his divine thoughts, to watch the sublime devotion of his life, to weep over his agonizing death. What must these disciples have felt when they beheld Paul the Pharisee, rejoicing over that death, expressing no contrition for the share

which the Pharisees had in the crucifixion, and shedding no tear on the page, which recorded the sufferings of Jesus.

From his Epistles it appears that St. Paul was a man of warm feelings and of affectionate disposition; but his whole nature was so absorbed in the Heavenly Christ that he had lost all recollection of the Earthly Jesus. Paul seems to admit this when he writes; "though we have known Christ after the flesh yet henceforth know we him no more."

It is manifest from passages already cited that the real Jesus had in Paul's mind been identified with the ideal conception of Philo's school; or perhaps Paul and Philo both derived their doctrines from antecedent writers, of whose philosophy some samples have been preserved in the Apocryphal books.

As St. Paul speaks of the two Adams so Philo writes; "the generation of man is twofold, one celestial the other terrestrial. The terrestrial man consists of particles of matter

called earth; the celestial man is made in the likeness of God, and is free from all earthly and corruptible nature."

Here the Apostle found the doctrine of the Jewish schools accomplished in the person of Christ. The terrestrial man had perished on the cross in a merciful sacrifice, while by resurrection from the dead, Christ, the first celestial man, was now acknowledged as the Son of God.

Thus Paul perceived that the instruction of his early years was reconciled with the creed of his maturer age. The real and the ideal beings were identified. An avenue now opened to the Apostle's sight leading to immortality.

The union of the Divine with the human nature had in Eastern religions been frequently typified as a marriage. The whole community of Christians constituted the bride with whom Christ would be now joined and they would be united in immortality. This the Apostle adds is the great mystery.

It is impossible here to separate ancient beliefs from the mysterious doctrines of a later theology, or to declare with confidence how far the religious teaching of St. Paul had been biassed by Eastern philosophies. He was the Jewish scribe bringing forth from his treasure things new and old, and regarded the old and the new as equally divine.

All these things, it is said, should be received in faith; and to faith therefore we must now turn.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FAITH.

"Primus est Deorum cultus Deos credere."—*Seneca.*

FAITH is the elementary principle of all religions. In this general sense faith has been defined, a vivid impression of the supernatural, or an unhesitating reliance founded on implicit belief in some Divine power.

The definition of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews, "the evidence of things not seen," is frequently cited as a Divine explanation of faith. This definition is not however of apostolic origin, since it is also found in Philo's life of Moses, where it is mentioned as an old Hebrew saying. Such an interpretation of the word faith has therefore no special claim to our acceptance, and its vagueness would obviously allow a large margin for human credulity.

Faith, although it is the eternal source of all religious feeling, has not any necessary connexion with moral virtue. Fanatic assassins and sensual idolaters have displayed a faith unsurpassed by Christian saints. An equally vehement faith oftentimes inflamed the persecutor with zeal, and armed the martyr with endurance.

Saul the Hebrew zealot, breathing forth threatenings and slaughter, was impressed with a faith as strong as Paul the Apostle. He would have suffered for the law and the traditions all that he afterwards suffered for the sake of Christ.

It is perplexing to find that the Jews are censured in the Gospels for want of faith. Whatever may have been their defects of character, their history during the two centuries preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, exhibits their fidelity and attachment to their ancestral religion.

They believed in the sanctity of their law,

in the literal predictions of their prophets, in the future advent of a Messiah, and in the glorious destiny of their race. Their intense belief occasioned the calamitous revolts, and fatal wars in which they were often engaged.

Hence followed the ruin of their holy city, and the final extinction of their nationality. The Jewish nation perished a martyr to its inflexible faith.

Yet these men are accused of want of faith! The various explanations offered on this subject are unsatisfactory. Martyrdom is usually accepted as a test of faith, and the Hebrew race offered up their lives for their religion.

Moreover, the disbelief of the Jews in Jesus was indispensable to the scheme of the atonement. This observation suggests endless difficulties, but they lead far away from the more immediate subject of inquiry.

These forms of faith, heathen and Jewish, do not represent the Christian faith insisted upon in the Pauline Epistles. St. Paul's language,

is as usual deficient in precision, and the example which he adduces does not assist in elucidating his meaning.

Sometimes he uses faith in the simple sense of belief. Sometimes faith means obedience to the Divine will. Sometimes the word signifies the Christian religion in the sense which he attached to Christianity.

Again, faith is a Divine grace, given only to Christians; while in other passages, faith has a more mysterious sense, and must be interpreted to mean a spiritual union with Christ.

Faith, in the Pauline theology, is the centre round which the whole system revolves, and by which it is held together. The Protestant therefore endeavours to find some comprehensive signification of this mysterious word, which will contain the various meanings alluded to in the Epistles of St. Paul.

St. Paul cites as an example of faith the conduct of Abraham when a son was promised to him in his old age. Our version of

Scripture represents Abraham as irreverently laughing, and openly expressing his distrust of Almighty power.

The history is however altogether incoherent, because at a later period Abraham marries another wife, Keturah, by whom, without Divine intervention, he has six sons.

In that age, Jewish writers, as may be seen in the works of the venerated Philo, paid little attention to actual history. They regarded the patriarchs as types or emblems of religious feelings, rather than as real historical fathers of the Hebrew race.

The history of Abraham contains striking instances of faith, in the sense of implicit reliance on Divine power; but the instance selected by St. Paul is not conducive to a clear apprehension of his meaning.

The Pauline representations of faith seem to have perplexed other Apostles, and the moral consequences of his doctrine evidently alarmed St. James so seriously, that he en-

deavoured in his own Epistle to counteract its effect.

If the Apostles themselves differed on the subject of faith, and found in St. Paul's writings things hard to be understood, it is not surprising that modern authors should have likewise failed in their endeavours to explain this Christian virtue.

A passage on faith, from a recent work, entitled "Ecce Homo," will serve to show the inconsistencies into which able men may be betrayed when they try to accommodate religious doctrine to modern notions.

"He, who when goodness is impressively put before him, exhibits an instinctive loyalty to it, starts forward to take its side, trusts himself to it: such a man has faith, and the root of the matter is in such a man. He may have habits of vice, but the loyal and faithful instinct in him will place him above many that practise virtue. He may be rude in thought and character, but he will unconsciously gravi-

tate towards what is right. Other virtues can scarcely exist without a fine natural organisation and a happy training. But the most neglected and ungifted of men may make a beginning with faith. Other virtues want civilisation, a certain amount of knowledge, a few books; but in half-brutal countenances faith will light up a glimmer of nobleness. The savage who can do nothing else, can wonder and worship, and enthusiastically obey."

This description of faith has been much admired, nevertheless the author and his eulogist appear to be equally at fault.

Two varieties of faith are here described: the first is moral goodness, which has unfortunately, in uneducated men, seldom been connected with faith. The second variety of faith, exemplified in the savage, who wonders and worships, contains indeed an ingredient of faith, but will probably lack the instinct of goodness. Such faith has incited men to the most cruel actions, while their enthusiastic

obedience renders them the pliant tools of any crafty impostor.

Surely this is a picture of credulity dressed up by rhetoric in the garb of faith, and disguised as an angel of light.

The Protestant student passes on from such eloquent illusions with feelings of disappointment.

The word Faith, in the Pauline Epistles, comprises three separate significations, connected with three separate faculties in the complex nature of man.

First, belief, which belongs to the understanding or intellectual nature.

Second, reliance or trust, which belongs to the moral nature.

Third, union, or identification with Christ;—this belongs to the spiritual nature.

It is manifest that this last perfection of faith would absorb, and therefore supersede, the feebler and more incomplete forms of faith. Paul's faith was an intense consciousness, in

which the whole sentient mind of the Apostle was impressed with the conviction of an union with Christ.

It is equally evident, that the contrast between faith and works could never have occurred, if this highest signification of faith had found entrance into the mind of St. James.

How far earnest believers have attained, or believed that they have attained, this transcendental faith, cannot be known. It is almost impossible for men, whose habits of thought and of feeling have been trained by modern education, and tempered by intercourse with existing society, to comprehend the mental condition which prevailed in former centuries under an entirely different state of civilisation. The faith of a devout Christian in the earliest age of Christianity, subjugated his whole nature, and was identified with his personal existence. He lived in an ecstacy of hope, awaiting the speedy advent of Christ, by whom and with whom he would be caught up into the clouds of heaven.

In James' Epistle, faith seems synonymous with belief. Luther, in his enthusiastic admiration of St. Paul, called the Epistle of James an epistle of straw. We, in this later age, without aspiring to the elevated doctrine of St. Paul, should be satisfied with a faith which could combine the conviction of the intellect, with the obedience of the heart.

Without attempting further to explain that spiritual faith which is a Divine grace, we must descend to the intellectual and moral faith, which commands only a precarious allegiance in this distracted and inquisitive world.

Instead of the absolute supremacy and unquestioned dominion, which faith formerly exercised over the human mind, her jurisdiction is now limited, she resembles a constitutional Sovereign, and must be careful not to strain her prerogative. The progress of civilisation has not been favourable to faith. All other Christian virtues,—justice, benevolence, temperance, patience, self-denial, are strength-

ened by education, and the advancement of religion is here in harmony with the moral improvement of society. Why then is one Christian virtue an exception? Why is faith weakened and impaired by the culture under which other Christian virtues thrive? Is faith left as the heritage of the uneducated?

An ignorant generation reposed in a Paradise of illusions, while its more learned and thoughtful progeny is excruciated with doubt.

In vain preachers now exhort to faith, and in vain they denounce infidelity; some stronger law over-rules mankind, and everywhere as experience advances, faith recedes.

The first element of faith is belief. Is belief then in itself a virtue? Philosophers, historians, scientific teachers, all our modern instructors warn us against facility of belief, which they declare to be the chief obstruction to knowledge, the bane of science, and the source of innumerable calamities.

Adam Smith, one of the oracles of modern

society declared: "The man scarce lives who is not more credulous than he ought to be, the natural disposition of man inclines him to believe, experience alone teaches incredulity, and seldom teaches it sufficiently."

It may be confidently affirmed that if belief is in itself a virtue, the whole course of modern education is a grave mistake. A system of instruction which teaches men to examine for themselves, to be cautious in accepting the opinions of other persons, to distrust authority, and to sift evidence, necessarily counteracts that disposition to believe which, Adam Smith says, is natural to mankind.

There are many indications of the success in this direction at least, which modern education has attained. The Protestant oftentimes takes up his open Bible, he wishes to believe, he tries to believe, he thinks at all events it is safest to believe, he feels ashamed of disbelief, he even debases his moral truthfulness by pretending to believe; all these efforts avail

him nothing, and he is at last obliged in his own conscience silently to confess—that he has been born some centuries too late.

"In all matters where faith is concerned," says Locke, "the first thing necessary is to fix the boundary between faith and reason, for I find that all sects, where reason will help them, make use of it gladly, but when it fails, they cry out: 'This is matter of faith, and above reason.'"

The frontier between faith and reason is still undefined; but it is now generally admitted that faith borders more closely on the feelings than on the reason. The chief religious leaders of mankind have been men who readily believed whatever vividly impressed their imagination. Such men hold that they have an internal witness, and can therefore dispense with all other evidence. This conviction can only be communicated to other sympathising natures.

In proportion to the success of modern

education, the more regular and disciplined exercise of the human faculties will tend to repress these impulses, and to subject the feelings to the understanding.

The innumerable influences of our existing civilisation operating through the channels of science, of literature, and of social intercourse both at home and abroad, alter our preconceived notions, and faith is gradually losing her empire over the mind; whole provinces have been wrested from her dominion, and her authority is becoming daily less secure.

There is, however, one unassailable fortress to which she may retire—faith in God. In this unapproachable sanctuary she will reig supreme.

This faith does not depend on the collation of manuscripts, or on the reconciliation of conflicting texts. The believer need not seek a foundation for his faith in a Vatican or Alexandrian Codex. He need not contend for the grammatical accuracy of a disputed

passage, or strain his faculties in vain attempts to solve a metaphysical problem.

He may leave to theological disputants the questions on which for so many centuries they have exercised their ingenuity. Here, at last, the natural and supernatural will be merged in one harmonious universe, under one Supreme intelligence.

In affliction and in sickness, the thoughtful man will find here his safest support. Even in that dread hour, when the shadows of death are gathering around him, when the visible world fades from his sight, and the human faculties fail, when the reason is enfeebled, and the memory relaxes its grasp, faith, the consoler still remains, soothing the last moments, and pointing to a ray of light beyond the mystery of the grave.

Is faith in God, the faith which Jesus taught? or is Christian faith more complex in its manifold requirements? To this question various are the replies, but every man must at last

seek the solution in his own mind, or his own heart. Theology cannot aid him;—for whilst faith would rely on Scripture, Scripture itself can only rely on faith.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ST. PAUL'S PLACE IN HISTORY.

THE preceding observations on the Pauline epistles suffice to prove that the Apostle's doctrines were for the most part of human origin. There are abundant materials for a more elaborate inquiry, but deeper research will only confirm this conclusion.

St. Paul was the human instrument for effecting a great change, whereby Christianity was raised from a local sect of Judaism to be the religion of the civilised world.

A careful scrutiny of his writings, in connexion with the history of that age, compels the student to admit that this change was accomplished by a man of strong feelings, of limited knowledge, and of untiring zeal.

Paul was impressed with an unhesitating conviction that he was spiritually united with Jesus. To the recipient of such divine grace the internal consciousness may be a sufficient proof; but the reader looks in vain for any evidence to justify the Apostle's belief.

Even in that trance or enraptured flight to which Paul alludes, he cannot throw off the prepossessions of the Jewish scribe, but repeats the Rabbinical tradition of the third heaven.

The Pauline epistles present to us a most interesting phase in the progress of religious thought, they assist to elucidate an important movement in the history of Christianity; but when we are solemnly asked to call these epistles, the word of God, a feeling of religious reverence forces us to withhold our assent.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GROWTH OF THEOLOGY.

THE history of the Church from St. Paul to St. Augustine comprises the growth and development of Christian theology. This period includes moreover the rudimentary forms of almost every subsequent religious opinion.

Mankind have been at all times more attracted by the mysteries of religion than by its moral precepts. "Toutes les fins de la religion se trouvent mieux dans les objets qu'on ne comprend point, on s'en fait une idée plus sublime, et même plus consolante, ils inspirent plus d'admiration, plus de respect, plus de crainte, plus de confiance."

The justice of this observation is strikingly exemplified in the annals of the Church.

During the first centuries of Christianity, speculative dogmas, and verbal subtleties, constituted the chief matter of religious thought. The Fathers of the Church seem to have emulated the old philosophers of Greece in their love of disputation; and no sooner had these controversialists folded up an incomprehensible dogma in unintelligible words, than the ignorant multitudes of Alexandria, of Constantinople, and of Milan, adopted it as the holy symbol of Christianity. Intense feelings of fanaticism were engendered, and populous cities were excited to tumult and bloodshed by conflicts upon questions, which no man living could understand.

The translation of Greek expressions into the more rigid terms of the Latin tongue, imparted a new shade of meaning, or perhaps of mystery, to the cherished tenets. The Eastern and the Western empires were alike involved in these fierce controversies, Christian charity was forgotten, and devout men felt

justified in killing one another, because they could not agree upon the nature of God.

The English translators of the Bible wisely admonish us that "to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left questionable can be no less than presumption."

To this serious charge the Fathers of the Church are justly liable. Ancient usage and a mechanical habit of inattentive repetition have blunted our feelings, otherwise we should be unable to endure the Ecclesiastical terms which describe the mysteries of the Godhead.

When we now look back to the controversies of those early times, we are surprised and shocked at the profane audacity of these churchmen. If any theologians in the present century had constructed creeds subdividing the Deity into persons, and then deciding upon their relationship, equality and consubstantiality; the presumption and impropriety of such vain conceits would have offended the whole Protestant world.

Yet these early Fathers were no better qualified than the clergy of the present day to discuss such mysteries. The lapse of ages has cast a halo of glory around the ancient names of men, whom the Catholic Church has sanctified, and we forget how frequently our orthodox tenets were ratified and established by the intrigues of a Council, or by the decision of an Emperor.

The Scripture had left many matters questionable, but on these points theologians delighted to dogmatise. Rationalists, said Bacon, are like to spiders, they spin everything out of their own bowels. In this sense Bacon imputed rationalism to the Greek philosophers whose theories were constructed out of their own imaginations.

The term is equally applicable to the Greek and Latin Fathers, who spun fanciful definitions of the Divine nature out of their own mystically entangled brains.

Sabellius, Arius, Athanasius, the heretical

and the orthodox teachers, were all alike rationalists. Our creeds, formularies, and articles of religion, have been irremediably tainted with the rationalism of the first Christian centuries.

In the heat of controversy, religious men become enthusiastic partisans, and are more eager for victory than for truth. Sectarian animosities render men unscrupulous, and they persuade themselves that they are contending for the glory of God, while they are only striving for their own pre-eminence.

On this point the three witnesses do indeed bear record, although not in behalf of the cause for which they were suborned. They stand there, eternal witnesses, to prove that neither the prescriptive sanctity of Holy writ, nor the solemn words of the beloved disciple, nor even the awful mystery of the Godhead, could secure the text of Scripture against the interpolations of controversial zeal.

The writings of the Fathers have lost their

influence in the Protestant world. The efforts made within the memory of living men to awaken an interest in these ancient authors produced a result which was not foreseen. The analogy which was pointed out between the Ecclesiastical and Evangelical miracles instead of establishing the Ecclesiastical, impaired the credit of the Evangelical miracles. So also the style of reasoning adopted by the Ecclesiastical writers induced men to examine in the same light the Epistles of St. Paul.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HERESY.

So long as the Church had unlimited power over the minds of men, any opinion which was deemed to conflict with its doctrines was denounced as heresy. During more than a thousand years the charge of heresy was the most terrible accusation which any man could incur. It is painful to reflect upon the sufferings which were inflicted for heresy,—not without the hearty approval of civilised society.

Educated and merciful men, believed that they were doing what was agreeable to God, when they delivered over a heretic to the fire, and thus gave him a foretaste of that penalty, which, according to their belief, awaited him for all eternity.

The Reformation brought no immediate relief to suffering humanity. The Reformers affixed the charge of heresy to any opinion which differed from their own interpretation of Scripture. Under this definition of heresy, the fires of martyrdom were piled up afresh, and men who had denounced the assumption of infallibility by the Church of Rome, now pronounced judgments as if they were themselves infallible.

The severe sentences recorded in the Old Testament, and also the language of St. Paul, were held to sanction these cruel practices. This Apostle, though he had separated himself from the religion of his fathers, and again, from the Church at Jerusalem, nevertheless denounced as accursed, and delivered over to Satan, those persons who taught a doctrine different from his own.

When Locke wrote that he considered toleration to be the characteristic mark of the true Church, he must have had on his mind some

ideal Church. On this principle, he would have regarded Gamaliel as a better Christian than St. Paul.

The seed of heresy seems to be indigenous in the human mind, and whenever the religious thoughts and feelings of men are deeply stirred, heresy, as if it was the natural product of the soil, springs up on every side.

To heresy we are indebted for a large portion of our civil and religious liberty. Even the wild fanaticism and coarse plebeian progeny—

> "Of petulant capricious sects,
> The maggots of corrupted texts,"

all contributed to the attainment of the liberty which modern society enjoys.

Sovereigns and States found it necessary to connive at heresy, connivance led to toleration, and toleration has been gradually developed into full liberty of thought.

Thus heresy, which had during many centuries been execrated and persecuted, as a sin

against God, and a crime against man, came forth at last from the dungeon and the flames to be acknowledged and honoured as the parent of intellectual freedom.

It has been often observed, that amidst the complex dispensations under which society has worked out its progress to a higher state of civilisation, heresy has performed an important part. We pray indeed for unity of faith, but the variety of our beliefs supplied the best security for our mental freedom, and perhaps also for our religious advancement.

The modes of error are innumerable, but one error counteracts or neutralises another, while doubt tempers the mind to humility.

Where infallibility is not claimed, heresy cannot be reasonably imputed. Thus, in Protestant communities, under the combined influence of milder manners and of modern thought, the word heresy has become obsolete; it has been altogether banished from civilised society, and placed in the index of prohibited expressions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RECAPITULATION.

A READER conversant with the biblical literature and theological disquisitions of modern times, will perceive that the preceding chapters are for the most part the logical sequence of these publications.

In a merely historical aspect these numerous works lead to the following general conclusion.

Christianity from the time when it was entrusted to the human mind, imbibed the imperfections of humanity.

Among the local Hebrew race, the first Christians appear as a Jewish sect, clinging to the temple, and adhering tenaciously to the Mosaic law.

St. Paul, although he released Christianity from the bondage of the law, bound it up and

blended it with the traditions of the Jewish schools. · In his mind Christianity became a compound of inconsistent doctrines, which has perplexed subsequent theologians.

The early Fathers of the Church educated in the later literature of Greece, and perhaps tainted with Gnostic notions, constructed a scheme of theogony, which constituted the chief part of their Christian theology. Aided by the secular authority, they enforced this scheme, as divine truth, upon a generation which had been nurtured in idolatrous usages.

The Church of Rome, less concerned for dogma than for power, applied Christianity to the purposes of empire, and gradually established an absolute and unprecedented dominion over the civilised world.

When, after centuries of abject servitude, the Teutonic race revolted, the leaders of the reformation fixed their attention on the doctrines, which had been the main instruments for the subjugation of mankind.

The two doctrines, Purgatory and the Real Presence, were the chief supports of the arrogant authority of the priesthood. The first was at once discarded, the second could not, for many reasons, be so easily rejected. Viewed by itself this doctrine would probably have been allowed to repose with other dogmas in the Protestant conscience. It was not worth while, as an historian observes, to set all Europe in flames for the sake of the difference between transubstantiation and consubstantiation, or even for the equally unintelligible compromise sanctioned by the English Church.

Human reason might have bowed down before this mystery, as it had already bowed before other Christian mysteries, and accepted this dogma in devout humility.

"Quod non sentis, quod non vides,
Animosa firmat fides."

But behind the dogma was the priest; who claimed the high authority associated with such supernatural power. This doctrine became

therefore the cardinal point of the controversy, and while the Scriptures were diligently searched for weapons, with which to combat the Church of Rome, the aid of human reason was also invoked in support of the Protestant cause.

Human reason was a powerful but a dangerous ally; when once admitted as the confederate of Protestantism, he arrogated to himself the chief command, and became turbulent and inquisitive. Luther lived to see the difficulties arising around, and prognosticated future perils. In vain he tried to restrict the presumptuous restlessness of human reason: in vain he exclaimed "orando melius quam disputando Deus quæritur et invenitur." The movement could not be checked, innumerable opinions were propagated, and Protestants were soon divided into an endless variety of sects and schisms. Every sect seized the Bible, and declared that they alone understood it.

" Hic liber est, in quo sua quærit dogmata quisque,
Invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua."

While Protestant churches and sects have been occupied in justifying their several denominational differences, the persistent examination of the Scriptures has opened a question of such magnitude, that in comparison with it the controversies of rival sects appear diminutive or worthless.

If the Gospels and the Epistles are discoloured by human error, whether that error be legendary tradition, or Eastern philosophy, the whole character of religious thought and of religious discussion must be changed. The weapons of controversy break in our hands; the basis of dogmatic theology crumbles to pieces under our feet. We have been wrangling over the transient notions of men, whilst we thought that we were vindicating our several interpretations of divine truth.

" Opinionum commenta delet dies ;" and time is now rapidly performing his appointed task.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COLOURLESS CHRISTIANITY.

"Quicquid recipitur, recipitur ad modum recipientis."

THE old prescriptive basis of the Protestant faith, namely, the recognition of the New Testament as the undoubted word of God, has been gradually weakened, and is now irreparably impaired.

This has been the inevitable result of the study of Scripture. The orthodox phrase is retained, but its signification is no longer the same; conscientious men have been so deeply impressed with this difficulty, that they deemed it right to explain the phrase as signifying that the Scripture contained the Word of God, instead of being actually the Word of God. The only straightforward and defensible course

consists in admitting that from the moment when Christianity entered into the mind of man, it acquired the taint of humanity. Our Church formally acknowledges that Councils have erred, and that Churches have erred; it must be also acknowledged that Evangelists have erred, and that Apostles have erred.

The position of the Christian Scriptures is necessarily changed by this admission. Christianity, however, made rapid and extensive conquests before it possessed any Canonical Scriptures, and before many of its dogmas had been constructed. Protestants may confidently rely on its spiritual life, although in the modern world scepticism has become, as it were, an indispensable ingredient of religious faith.

The Christian Scriptures picture in vivid colours the form which Christianity assumed at an early period in the minds of Evangelists and of Apostles; these Scriptures repeat moreover the broken echo of the holiest truths, but they present also in almost every page an

impress of contemporary errors, and sometimes of mischievous superstitions.

Such notions, it will be said, lead to a vague indefinite colourless Christianity, and leave the Protestant without a creed.

All creeds are of human origin, and the endeavour to construct a precise creed on matters which are beyond the scope of the human intellect, has been the stumbling-block of Christians from the first century to the present day.

In the earliest age devout men conscientiously differed as to the mystery which seemed to them to be the elementary principle of Christian belief; and Athanasius himself confessed that the more he meditated upon it, the less he understood it.

The disproportion between the human and the divine nature did not in ancient times appear so immeasurable as it now appears to the educated Protestant.

History, philosophy, and poetry in that age

tended to promote a belief in the union of the Divine with the human nature, or at least in the approach of the human to the Divine mind.

If we turn to the modern world, we perceive an entirely different tone of thought and feeling; the horizon is enlarged, but the view is less distinct. This is the inevitable consequence of increased knowledge; and definite creeds embodied in artificial phrases will no longer be accepted as positive truth.

Men harassed by these difficulties have recourse to various modes of allaying insidious doubts. Some take refuge in mysticism, some seek a remedy in philosophy, and some again in physical science.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MODERN EDUCATION.

Doubts which have arisen from the examination of Scripture are increased and appear to be justified by the modern course of study in history, science, and philosophy.

The study of physical science elevates our notion of the Deity and renders us conscious of an invisible intelligence and power far surpassing the sublimest visions which the Hebrew prophets ever beheld. This study however qualifies the ancient notions of man's position in the universe.

In past ages the earth was thought to be the centre of the celestial system, and man the principal being for whose benefit the heavenly bodies were illumined. When science had reduced the earth to a comparatively insigni-

ficant unit amid the countless spheres of creation, man was simultaneously lowered in his position, and knowledge for the second time brought about his fall.

Our modern scientific teachers appear to perceive nothing but an indissoluble chain of cause and effect, or at least of unvarying sequence, operating with a regularity which requires no adjustment, and admits of no intervention. Where nothing has to be further provided, Providence is an erroneous term, or must receive another meaning from its usual acceptation in the nomenclature of the unscientific world.

An exclusive attention to physical science may perhaps disqualify the mind for the more enlarged contemplation which a nobler philosophy requires.

On this subject there are some remarks by V. Cousin deserving of attention.

"Les rapports qui unissent la création et le créateur composent un problème obscur et

delicat, dont les deux solutions extrèmes sont egalement fausses et périlleuses; ici un Dieu tellement passé dans le monde, qu'il a l'air d'y être absorbé; la un Dieu tellement séparé du monde, que le monde a l'air de marcher sans lui; des deux côtés égal excès, égal danger, égale erreur."

It becomes obvious that our scientific teachers have led us to speculate on questions which are unsusceptible of solution.

A similar observation may justly be applied to the doctrines of many modern philosophers. In the present imperfect state of human knowledge the endeavour to construct a positive philosophy is obviously premature. A genuine philosophy of the mind may eventually disclose a system as sublime and ennobling, as the discoveries revealed by science in the visible universe.

For these results however we must wait, remembering that truth is the daughter of time, and not of authority. The theories of scien-

tific men, and the reveries of philosophers are valuable as incitements to further investigation, but do not satisfy the requirements of civilised society, which is earnestly desirous of moral, of intellectual and of religious advancement.

These are the inestimable benefits which men expect from Christianity, and since religion may be judged by its fruits, that form of Christianity which develops the highest qualities of human nature and furthers the continued improvement of society, may be safely accepted as the nearest approach to religious truth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TWO OPPOSITE DEVELOPMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE history of the Romish Church exhibits a certain progress or succession of developments, which have been by some writers carefully traced back through many centuries.

It may be doubted however whether the faith of the Catholic community has increased in proportion to the additional dogmas imposed on the Catholic conscience. The Protestant religion is developing itself in an opposite direction. The tendency of the Protestant mind is to release itself from dogmas; and although in all matters of religion men move with justifiable timidity, yet the evidences of such movement are undeniable.

Is the established Church then to remain petrified in the system accepted at the Refor-

mation? What ground is there for assuming that the Church attained the perfection of doctrinal truth three hundred years ago? A certain pattern of doctrine was then approved, signed and sealed, officially registered, and stamped with the Royal arms. From this pattern no deviation is allowed. The statesmen of that day had however no special gift qualifying them to fix for all future time the religion of the English Church.

The Protestant Church is not bound by a "non possumus." Change is the indispensable condition of all earthly life, and a religion which blends and identifies itself with the inmost thoughts and feelings of man, cannot be exempt from human mutability. A restlessness is visible in the clergy as well as in the laity; and if the clergy had not been restricted from guiding us, they might still have remained the enlightened leaders of educated society.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A GLIMPSE OF BETTER DAYS.

Auspicium melioris ævi.

THE foregoing pages contain an epitome of the causes which have produced the deep biblical scepticism of the present day, and are thought to justify its existence. Those persons who are eager to refute this scepticism have here an ample field for their exertions.

The questions at issue are however of a nature which controversial warfare cannot decide. They must be left to the judgment of another generation.

It is impossible to predict what will be the Protestantism of the future; but there are many indications that none of the existing denominations will resist the mental wear and tear of the next fifty years.

A large portion of the people will, it may be hoped, be better educated. Their opinions will then approximate to the views prevalent amongst the cultivated classes of society. This progress will not be favourable to sectarian distinctions.

The Universities are now open to all religious persuasions, and will soon offer their emoluments to the ablest men in every class of life. The churchman and the non-conformist will be trained alike in history, philosophy and kindred studies.

A new school of thought will gradually predominate, and the wall of partition between churchman and non-conformist will be broken down.

The community will be influenced by the current of thought flowing from the Universities, religious teachers of more enlarged views will then be required.

We may hope also that by the continued progress of learning and of liberty, Christianity,

as Butler long ago predicted, will be better understood. The ministers of religion will again become the teachers of the people, and the open Bible will irresistibly lead to the open church.

Religious and secular instruction will then be in unison, the distinctions of Protestant sects will be obliterated and forgotten, and the Church would, without any violent convulsion, become the church of the whole Protestant people.

Such a course of enlightened policy would be far preferable to the continued maintenance of the existing denominations, which are becoming every day less and less suited to satisfy the moral and intellectual demands arising from expanded knowledge, and from the freer discussions of religious thought.

These speculations, however, lead us far away from the world in which we live. For the present disputes must still divide and irritate the Protestant community. Vigorous but

narrow-minded men, usually exercise most influence over the least educated classes of society; and public opinion can only be brought by slow degrees to entertain a view of Christianity unencumbered with the prescriptive phrases belonging to another state of civilisation. The leaven is still fermenting in the human mind, and education must accelerate the process.

Sumunt boni, sumunt mali,
Sorte tamen inæquali.

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